

A Window on Motivation in the War for American Independence:  
The Battle of Williamson's Plantation, 12 July 1780

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of History.

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## ABSTRACT

Paul W. Metzloff

A Window on Motivation in the War for American Independence:  
The Battle of Williamson's Plantation, 12 July 1780

(Under the direction of Dr. Richard H. Kohn)

This thesis examines the motivations of the men who fought a small battle in the South Carolina backcountry. Using a wide array of primary sources to examine the events leading up to the battle in detail, it specifically analyzes the factors which brought both the rebel militiamen and the Loyalist regular and irregular soldiers into the respective armies, kept them there, and made them fight. It concludes that the patriot forces in this case were more solidly motivated, with a more comprehensive and flexible set of reasons for fighting, and that this contributed to and indeed was a major factor in their victory. More importantly, this thesis illustrates the intricate and complex nature of military motivation in the American War for Independence.

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## Introduction

On 12 July 1780, at a backwoods plantation in South Carolina, rebel militiamen fought and won a small battle against Loyalist regulars and Tory militia. The Battle of Williamson's Plantation, or Huck's Defeat, as the locals called it, was the first check to the British in South Carolina after their capture of Charleston in May 1780. Coming after this disastrous loss and a time of widespread discouragement for the American patriots in the South, the Battle of Williamson's Plantation offers a valuable case study in military motivation. A detailed examination of what brought men of both sides to this battle sheds light on the revolutionary militia, the Loyalists fighting for Great Britain, and the nature of the war in the Southern backcountry. The study of motivation also provides insights on the eventual American success and British failure in the war.

Motivation has always challenged historians. While military historians have examined motivation in other wars in detail, they have generally glossed over or simplified why men fought during the War for Independence. Old-style military histories assumed that patriotism and support for the rebellion and independence explained motivation, and more recent scholarship has argued that economic factors were paramount. Historians, when they have dealt with the topic, have also focused almost exclusively on the motivation of Continental soldiers, while providing little analysis on that of the militia.<sup>1</sup> And, while many have traced the details of the war and its myriad battles, few have asked into how or why the battles occurred.<sup>2</sup> Finally, while historians have been examined the

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<sup>1</sup> For the Continentals, see Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 496-510, and "Why Men Fought in the American Revolution," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Spring 1980), 135-148. Also see Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 373-378. Both support more encompassing and complex explanations for motivation than the previous standard. For the militia, see John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997) and Don Higginbotham, "The American Militia: a Traditional Institution with Revolutionary Responsibilities," in *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War*, edited by Don Higginbotham (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 83-188. For militia in two particular locations see Robert Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), and Steven Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class: The Philadelphia Militia and "Lower Sort" during the American Revolution, 1775-1783* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987). For Washington's use of the militia in the middle states, see Mark Kwasny, *Washington's Partisan War* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Three recent works are John S. Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1782* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985); Dan Morrill, *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* (Baltimore, MD: the Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1993); and John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997). Buchanan has the best treatment of motivation, particularly in chapters 7 through 10; he maintains that patriotism was the key factor, though he does briefly discuss a few others. The classic old-style works on the war in South Carolina are Edward McCrady's *The History of South Carolina in the*

common soldier of the Revolution, they have rarely addressed why he took up arms, remained in the army, and fought.<sup>3</sup> Soldier motivation in the War for Independence deserves far greater emphasis and analysis than it has heretofore received.

One reason why motivation in the War of Independence may not have received significant study may be that motivation, in any war, is extremely complex. Historians investigating other wars have divided motivation into three separate types: *initial* motivation, why men join military forces; *sustaining* motivation, why they stay; and *combat* motivation, why they fight.<sup>4</sup> Motives are not limited to one of these three categories; revenge, for example, might be both an initial and a sustaining factor. But the distinctions between the kinds of motivation are important, and help to illustrate its inherent complexity. At Williamson's Plantation, a number of all three types of motivation existed on both sides.

A perceived lack of material has been a second reason why study of motivation has been neglected in the War for Independence. In other wars, particularly the Civil War and World War II, research can focus upon a massive array of sources, including letters, diaries, journals, surveys, interviews, and official records. While such sources are more limited for the Revolutionary War, detailed examination of the members of specific units, attention to the context of a battle or campaign, and adaptation of methods developed for later wars can result in useful conclusions on motivation. In particular, the use of all available sources, even those often neglected as peripheral to military operations (such as pension applications) can provide valuable insights.<sup>5</sup> Even with a battle

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*Revolution, 1775-1780* and *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1780-1783* (New York: MacMillan and Company, 1901 and 1902).

<sup>3</sup> Studies of the common soldier of the revolution include Charles Bolton's *The Private Soldier Under Washington* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902); Edward Papenfuss and Gregory Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits: The Peacetime Career of the Revolutionary War Private" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 30, No. 1 (January 1973), 117-132; and John Sellers' "The Common Soldier in the American Revolution," in *The Military History of the American Revolution: The Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> Military History Symposium, United States Air Force Academy*, edited by Stanley Underdal (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1976), 151-161. Paul Nelson's "The American Soldier and the American Victory," in *The World Turned Upside Down: The American Victory in the War of Independence*, edited by John Ferling (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 35-51 is also valuable. As noted above, however, these works concentrate on Continental soldiers rather than militia.

<sup>4</sup> John Lynn first proposed this model in *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791-1794* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984), xii, 35-36, and 177-182. It has also been used by James McPherson in *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12 and *passim*. Its simplicity and utility make it an excellent conceptual framework for detailed examination of military motivation. Another excellent work that covers modern combat motivation in detail is Anthony Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle* (Boston, MA: Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishers, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> The Revolutionary War Pension Accounts, applications for soldier pensions received by the federal government in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are only beginning to receive widespread use by scholars. An edited version of a number of these accounts is John Dann's *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Lawrence Babits' *A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) also uses pension accounts in an extremely detailed battle history.

as small as Williamson's Plantation, with fewer than four hundred participants, enough source material exists for profitable analysis of motivation.

General George Washington offered a brief comment on motivation about a month before the Battle of Williamson's Plantation. He called the loss of Charleston in May 1780 a "severe blow," but also stated that the defeat was almost "necessary, to rouse us."<sup>6</sup> He was right. Even while the British and their local Loyalist supporters consolidated their hold on South Carolina, the rebel militiamen of the state were roused. The Battle of Williamson's Plantation, when examined in detail, offers a window into the motivations of the patriots and Loyalists who fought there.

Some rebels from York and Chester districts believed deeply in their cause and had fought in the rebellion from its beginnings in 1775. Others, more pragmatically, wanted revenge for recent British and Loyalist atrocities. Nearly all were Scots-Irish Presbyterians, infuriated by British church burning, persecution of ministers, and public blasphemy. A few were caught up in the excitement of the war or wanted plunder. Most fought because the enemy was at their doorstep and they felt they had to fight for their own safety. Perhaps most important, the rebel militiamen at Williamson's fought because their relatives, neighbors, and friends did – the wider war had become a community affair in the spring of 1780.

The Loyalists at Williamson's had other motives. Most believed in their cause, and genuinely felt that they would be better off as subjects of the King. Many felt that the British would soon be victorious, at least in the South, and wanted to side with the winners. Some fought for the regular pay or for the rank and prestige of service in the Provincial Corps of the British Army. A few, particularly those in the local Loyalist militia, may have been forced into service. In almost all cases, the presence of the regular British Army critical to the Loyalists – allowing them to declare their allegiance, giving them the opportunity or pressuring them to serve, or providing the support and direction they needed to fight.

Thus the men on opposite sides of the battlefield at Williamson's Plantation were brought there by a wide array of motives. Those factors that put the rebels and Loyalists into two opposing armies, kept them there, and motivated them to fight had a decisive impact on when, how, and why the battle was fought. Soldier motivation explains much about the Battle of Williamson's Plantation.

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<sup>6</sup> George Washington to James Bowdoin, 14 June 1780. In *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources*, Vol. 19, edited by John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931), 9.

### **"Hearty in our Cause" : The Background of the Rebellion**

The South Carolina campaigns of 1780 grew out of events that occurred long before the fighting began. Prior to the war, up to 1775, only Charleston and the coastal lowlands of South Carolina leaned towards rebellion against England. The people on the frontier, or 'backcountry,' concerned themselves more with daily living, and their politics emphasized their lack of representation in the state assembly and of the basic benefits of government. Law enforcement, courts, schools, and roads were either nonexistent or rudimentary on the frontier. Tensions over these issues between the settlers and the lowcountry residents helped lead to the Regulator movement of the late 1760's, in which frontier citizens took the law into their own hands.<sup>7</sup> Many of the backcountry people still felt these tensions in the 1770's, for many of the problems still existed, and they were thus indifferent or hostile to the idea of rebellion against England. Region and class separated them from the coastal seat of unrest, and in general they did not share in the early opposition to British rule.

With the outbreak of open war in the spring of 1775, the rebel leadership in Charleston realized that they needed the support of the frontier, especially as it contained most of South Carolina's free white population. The patriots sent several prominent men, led by William Henry Drayton and William Tennent, to convert the residents of the backcountry to their cause. The mission met with mixed success, often receiving hostility or complete indifference from the settlers. In the northwestern part of the state, however, between the Broad and Catawba rivers, Drayton stated that the people of York and Chester districts were "very hearty in our cause."<sup>8</sup> Tennent felt he would be able to "fix this District, in the right cause" and convinced most of the local men to sign the Association, a statement of support for the revolution and resistance to British authority.<sup>9</sup> One resident, William Hill, a prominent planter and ironmaster with ties to the lowcountry, supported the

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<sup>7</sup> Tensions were notable in Virginia and North Carolina as well as South Carolina; the Regulator disturbances in the Carolinas were the major outbursts in the 1760's. See Rachel Klein, "Ordering the Backcountry: The South Carolina Regulation," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Volume 38, No. 4 (October 1981), 661-680, and *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1990), 47-77. The standard work on the Regulators is Richard Maxwell Brown's *The South Carolina Regulators* (Cambridge, MA: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963).

<sup>8</sup> John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*, (Charleston, SC: A.E. Miller, 1821), 376. John collected and edited the memoirs of his father, William Henry Drayton. Also see Lewis Pinckney Jones, *The South Carolina Civil War of 1775* (Lexington, SC: The Sandlapper Store, 1975) 44, 51-52, 54, and 58. York and Chester districts were informal designations at the time; both were part of the larger Camden District established after the Regulator agitation. York district was sometimes called the 'New Acquisition,' as it had been recently acquired from North Carolina.

<sup>9</sup> William Tennent to Henry Laurens, August 20<sup>th</sup> 1775. In *ibid.*, 411. Tennent was a minister, and combined his politics with his preaching; he spoke at two local churches (Beersheba and Bullock's Creek) that day. Laurens was one of the patriot leaders in Charleston.

patriot cause from its beginnings and called the Tennent-Drayton mission a "very judicious plan" for gaining popular support.<sup>10</sup> Above and beyond the local elite, the average settlers of this region also supported resistance to England. In later accounts, several of the area's common soldiers were called such things as "a true Whig" and "a good friend to his country."<sup>11</sup> One described John Carroll, a private who would be at Williamson's, as "a whig from the first . . . a whig to the last; he didn't believe in the tories, and he made the tories believe in him."<sup>12</sup> Thus, in contrast to many other sections of the frontier, this area had a record of adherence to the rebellion beginning in 1775.<sup>13</sup>

The settlers from York and Chester backed up their beliefs with action. Two hundred men from the local militia served in the campaign against backcountry Loyalists in late 1775, culminating in the battle at Great Cane Break, which effectively ended large-scale Tory activity in South Carolina until 1779.<sup>14</sup> The local militia also became adept at suppressing small-scale local Loyalism, doing so for the remainder of the war – a key but often overlooked aspect of the Revolution.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, many York and Chester men served in the 1776 campaign against the Cherokee. Loosely allied with the British and seen as a threat to the frontier, the Cherokee had attacked a farm in York district in April 1776.<sup>16</sup> Sentiment against the Indians was a strong unifying force in the backcountry, cutting across all other issues and loyalties, and the effort against them served to strengthen the nascent rebel government.<sup>17</sup> A few local men also joined the state or Continental units for service near the coast or

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<sup>10</sup> William Hill, *Col. William Hill's Memoirs of the Revolution*, edited by A.S. Salley, Jr. (Columbia, SC: the State Company, 1921), 28.

<sup>11</sup> From the pension applications of William Armstrong, Federal Pension Account S6354, National Archives Microfilm M804, Roll 76, Frame 0530; and Archibald Brown, Federal Pension Account S39249, National Archives Microfilm M804, Roll 359, Frame 0176.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Ellet, *Women of the American Revolution*, Vol. 1 (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1848-1850), 243-244. While Ellet's work is typical of the fairly overblown rhetoric of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, she did use contemporary sources and personal interviews, so her narratives do have historical value.

<sup>13</sup> Many historians have commented upon the tendency of local communities to side completely with either the Whigs or the Tories. See Jac Weller, "The Irregular War in the South," *Military Affairs*, Vol. 24, Issue 3 (Autumn 1960), 124-136, and Klein, *Unification of a Slave State*, 78-108.

<sup>14</sup> See Jones, *The South Carolina Civil War of 1775*.

<sup>15</sup> Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*, especially "A New Look at the Colonial Militia," 29-42, and "The Military Conflict Considered as a Revolutionary War," 213-244.

<sup>16</sup> Klein, *Unification of a Slave State*, 92.

<sup>17</sup> See Klein, *Unification of a Slave State*, 78-108, and also "Frontier Planters and the American Revolution: The South Carolina Backcountry, 1775-1782," in *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry During the American Revolution*, edited by Ron Hoffman, Thad Tate, and Peter Albert (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1985), 37-69. Klein argues that the Whigs eventually dominated the backcountry because they better represented and protected the interests of the emerging planter class. Against the Cherokee, the militia defeated them in 1776 by winning a few skirmishes and destroying their villages; troops from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia participated. See Clyde



in the North, supporting the larger effort against the British. Most, however, preferred to remain near their own homes.

This active support for the revolution in York and Chester districts stemmed from a tradition of fighting. Violence was common in the backcountry, and often an effective means of achieving goals for the settlers. The Cherokee War of 1760 and 1761, the Regulator Movement of the late 1760's, and the fighting between Whigs and Tories and settlers and Indians in 1775 and 1776 all contributed to this heritage of violence. While the backcountry men were not very active militarily in the four years from 1776 to 1780, as the fighting was mainly in the North, there were raids launched from British-held Florida and Georgia into South Carolina in 1778 and 1779. The continued presence of Indians and local Tories also required vigilance. These events and threats meant that the frontiersmen had experience with mobilizing and with fairly large-scale military maneuvers. Though regulars and historians have tended to disparage militiamen as inexperienced, these men were not new to violence, which had solved problems for them in the past.<sup>18</sup> There was a core of experienced fighters in the South Carolina backcountry, and at Williamson's Plantation, over half the Whigs had fought or served in some way since 1775.<sup>19</sup>

The local leaders, in particular, had experience. Generally older than their men, the militia officers had all fought before Williamson's Plantation. Richard Winn campaigned against the Cherokee, in Florida, and in Georgia. John Moffett served against the Loyalists. William Hill, the wealthy planter and ironmaster, served from the start of the war, as did Andrew Neel, whose father led the 200 local militiamen against the Loyalists in 1775. The militia colonels, William Bratton and Samuel Watson, marched towards Charleston in the spring of 1780 but returned home after news of the city's fall. John McClure and his company of horsemen had a brush with the British at Monck's Corner in April. Finally, Edward Lacey, a veteran of the French and Indian War, served against the Cherokee in 1776. The militia leaders of York and Chester were veterans.<sup>20</sup>

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Ferguson, "Functions of the Partisan-Militia in the South During the American Revolution," in *The Revolutionary War in the South*, edited by Robert Higgins (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979), 239-258, and particularly 247-258.

<sup>18</sup> See Robert Calhoon, *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America, 1760-1781* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 492, for a discussion of the endemic violence on the frontier, particularly in South Carolina. A general treatment on the uses of violence in the revolution is Richard Maxwell Brown's "Violence and the American Revolution," in *Essays on the American Revolution*, edited by Stephen Kurtz and James Hutson (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1973), 81-120.

<sup>19</sup> Bobby G. Moss, *Roster of South Carolina Patriots in the American Revolution* (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1983), *passim*. Moss' work is a genealogical reference book with limited military information, but provides detailed biographical information and cross-references other sources. My roster of patriot militiamen who were present at Williamson's contains 72 'definite' entries, with support from about ten primary sources. For a discussion of hard-core fighters in the war, see John Shy, "Hearts and Minds in the American Revolution: The Case of 'Long Bill' Scott and Peterborough, New Hampshire," in *A People Numerous and Armed*, 163-180.



When the British invasion of South Carolina brought the wider war back to the frontier in the spring and summer of 1780, then, the York and Chester militia already had a tradition of support for and service to the rebellion, and tendency towards violence. While events immediately after the fall of Charleston would prevent them from acting, for a time, the backcountry rebels had initial motives to join the forces opposing the British and sustaining motives to keep them there.

### **"Counter-revolution" : The British Occupation of South Carolina**

The British undertook a campaign in the South as a result of earlier failures in the other colonies. After losing an army to the rebels at Saratoga in 1777, and with France's active entry into the war in early 1778, the British gave up their attempts to conquer New England and the middle colonies and began to focus on the South. Believing the northern colonies to be more committed to the rebellion, London placed a higher priority on taking and holding the weaker southern colonies and defending the highly valuable Caribbean Islands. The supposed prevalence of Loyalism in the South also encouraged British efforts there, and held out the possibility of bringing the colonies back into the Royal fold by gradually working northwards. This southern strategy, designed to exploit American vulnerabilities and protect the important parts of the Empire, made sense from the British perspective.<sup>21</sup>

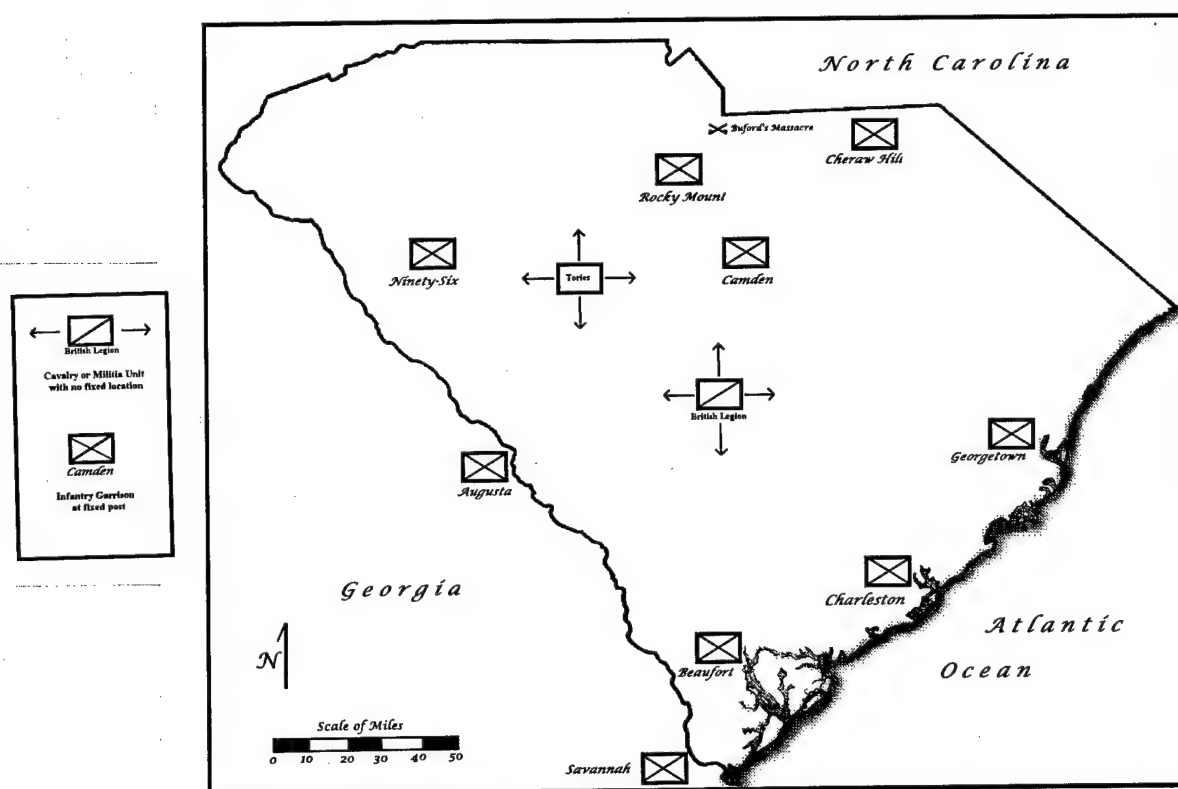
The implementation of this strategy began with the capture of Savannah, Georgia, in December of 1778. After the seizure of its only major town, Georgia, the weakest and most exposed of the states, seemed to be under effective British control by 1779. A combined American and French attack to retake Savannah in October 1779 failed, and the British then moved from Georgia to South Carolina in early 1780. The King's troops, under General Sir Henry Clinton, took Charleston on 12 May, capturing General Benjamin Lincoln's some 5,000 Continental and state troops.

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<sup>20</sup> This biographical information is contained under the individual entries in Moss, *Roster of South Carolina Patriots*. Also see Hill, *Memoirs of the Revolution*, Richard Winn, "General Richard Winn's Notes - 1780," edited by Samuel C. Williams, *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, Vol. 43 (1942) and Vol. 44 (1943), 201-212 and 1-10, and M.A. Moore, *Life of General Edward Lacey*, (Spartanburg, SC: 1859; reprinted by A Press: 1981). While Moore's book is a secondary source, Moore based it on personal recollections and interviews. His father, James Moore, was a participant at Williamson's. The average age of the militia officers was 30, compared to an average of 23 for the men.

<sup>21</sup> Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964). Mackesy's work is an interpretation of overall British strategy and illustrates how the war in America became a small part of a global conflict after 1778. Also see Paul H. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats: A Study in British Revolutionary Policy* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1964). Smith, 88, makes the point that supporting the perceived masses of Southern Loyalists was the main impetus behind the new British strategy.

The loss of this largest southern city and its defenders was a devastating blow to the rebels. In Congress, there was talk of abandoning the South to the British – the first time such an idea had been seriously considered. Many South Carolinians had also given up hope, and rebel Governor John Rutledge despaired of retaking Charleston and fled to North Carolina. One congressman feared that “the whole country” would fall.<sup>22</sup> With the loss of the main southern army at Charleston, most felt that the state militia was far out of its depth. Indeed, British forces began to occupy most of South Carolina, establishing strategic posts, sending out cavalry patrols, and recruiting Loyalists.



Map 1 – The British Occupation of South Carolina, June 1780<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> John Rutledge, in a letter to Abner Nash, 24 May 1780. In Henry Commager and Richard Morris, editors, *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 1116-1117. Congressman John Mathews of South Carolina to Thomas Bee, 9 June 1780, in Paul Smith, editor, *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, Vol 15 (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1976), 281-283.

<sup>23</sup> The outline of South Carolina is adapted from a map in Terry Lipscomb, "South Carolina Revolutionary War Battles, Part 3," *Names in South Carolina* Vol 22 (Winter, 1975), 33. Information on the location of units is from Charles Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War* (Dublin, Ireland: P. Wogan, P. Byrne, J. Moore & W. Jones, 1794), 217, and Banastre Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America* (London: T. Cadell, 1787), 86-88.

The British Army also eliminated the last organized American force in the South at the end of May. About 400 Virginia Continentals under Colonel Abraham Buford had been marching for Charleston, as reinforcements, but did not reach the city before it fell. After hearing of the city's capture, they retreated towards North Carolina. But Clinton, aware of Buford's force, sent his second-in-command, Lord Charles Cornwallis, in pursuit. British cavalry, under Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton, caught up with Buford's men on 29 May, in a region called the Waxhaws, just across the Catawba River from York and Chester districts. Tarleton's men destroyed or captured all of Buford's command, for a time refusing to take prisoners and slaughtering the wounded.<sup>24</sup>

This action, since referred to as 'Buford's Massacre,' had both mixed results for the British. In the short run, it eliminated Buford's force and gave Tarleton and his British Legion a fearsome reputation. The rebels became "loth to engage the horse [the Legion cavalry] as they had cut Buford's men to pieces so shortly before" and six weeks would pass before the militia could muster the courage to try.<sup>25</sup> In the long run, however, such actions gave the population little reason to trust the King's soldiers, and inspired locals to resist. At the home of John Gaston, for example, the Gaston brothers and their cousins John McClure and James Knox were present when the tidings of Buford's Massacre arrived, and "At this news, the young men rose with one accord, and . . . pledged to suffer death rather than submit to the invader."<sup>26</sup> When compounded with later British and Tory conduct, Buford's Massacre did much to encourage rebel opposition. The phrase 'Tarleton's Quarter' came to mean not mercy, but revenge.

For over a month after the Massacre, however, the local settlers were cowed. Tarleton's force left the Waxhaws unmolested, and the continuing occupation met little resistance. The British had captured most prominent rebels in South Carolina by this time, either imprisoning them or freeing them on parole. In Charleston, the newly established *Royal Gazette* proclaimed the British reconquest of the colony. Organized American resistance had seemingly disappeared, and Clinton

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<sup>24</sup> J. Tracy Power, "'The Virtue of Humanity Was Totally Forgot': Buford's Massacre, May 29, 1780," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, Volume 93, No. 1 (June 1992), 5-14. For the British perspective, in which Tarleton maintained that there was only some delay in taking prisoners when his men became upset when he was unhorsed, see Tarleton, *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781*, 28-32.

<sup>25</sup> Winn, "Notes," 204-205. Rebel militia almost always had trouble engaging British or Loyalist regulars, especially early in the war. Notable examples of militia failures against regulars include the Battle of Long Island (August 1776, where 6,000 militiamen departed during the battle), the Second Battle of Saratoga (October 1777, where most of the militia left the morning of the battle when their enlistments expired), and the battle of Camden (August 1780, where the militia broke and ran as soon as the battle started). There were militia successes, such as Lexington and Concord, Breed's Hill, King's Mountain, and Cowpens, but these were cases where the militia was under cover, up against Tory militia, or extremely well led.

<sup>26</sup> Ellet, *Women of the Revolution*, Vol. 3, 158. This version is supported by Joseph Gaston's personal account in "A Reminiscence of the War of the Revolution, in South Carolina," *Historical Magazine*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 2 (August 1873), 90-92.

felt so secure in his victory that he returned to New York, leaving the occupation in the capable hands of Lord Cornwallis.

There were a few minor examples of patriot defiance; in York and Chester districts, rebels dispersed Tory groups at Mobley's Meeting House around 3 June, at Alexander's Old Fields on 6 June, and at Stalling's on about 9 June. But these were small skirmishes, involving only local Loyalists. The rebels still feared British or Loyalist regulars, and British proclamations of lenient treatment for rebels who surrendered effectively quieted resistance. Cornwallis had every reason to believe his "counter-revolution" in South Carolina virtually complete.<sup>27</sup>

Even in York and Chester, resistance diminished. Samuel Watson and William Bratton, the local militia colonels, gathered their men at Bullock's Creek church on 12 June. Despite the three successful attacks on the Tories, many felt that the Whig cause was desperate.<sup>28</sup> William Hill recalled that the colonels told the men "they had hitherto done their duty" but "further opposition to the British would not avail," and they should go home and "do the best they could for themselves."<sup>29</sup> Some of the men, more positive, made speeches encouraging resistance, and resolved to meet again in a few days at William Hill's ironworks. But the assembly also sent a messenger to Lord Rawdon, the British commander at nearby Camden, to find out what terms he might offer them to surrender. The meeting broke up with some men departing for the sanctuary of North Carolina, others planning to gather at the ironworks, and many simply going home.

Thus when British troops reached their area, the Whigs of York and Chester were scattered, divided, and seemingly without hope. The initial and sustaining motives of belief in and support for the rebellion and the tradition of violence were not gone, for some men remained in the field and others would before long reform. But events outside the backcountry and the apparent success of the British had dampened the militia's potential for immediate resistance. The rebels needed additional motives to gather, stay together, and fight.

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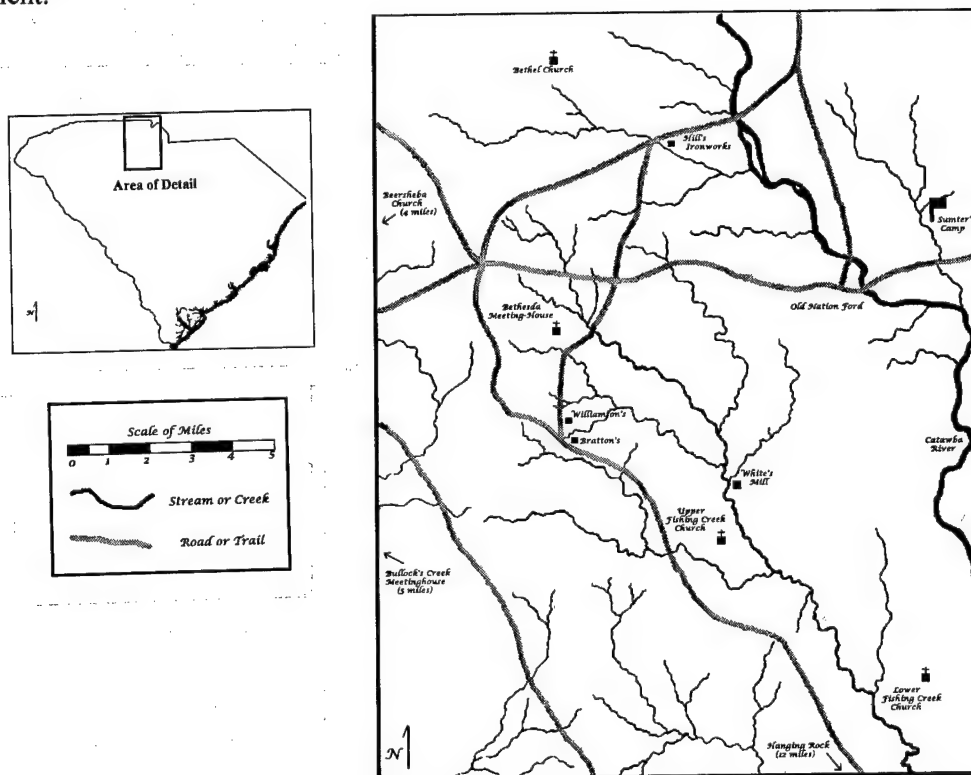
<sup>27</sup> Stedman, *History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War*, 220. See also Sir Henry Clinton, *The American Rebellion: Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of His Campaigns, 1775-1782, with an Appendix of Original Documents*, ed. William Willcox (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 174, for a discussion of Clinton's early lenient parole policies for the rebels. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 131, also argues that the initial lenient policies were effective.

<sup>28</sup> James Saye, "The Memoirs of Major Joseph McJunkin, Revolutionary Patriot" (first printed in the Richmond, VA *Watchman and Observer*, 1847; reprinted in Spartanburg, SC: A Press, Inc., 1977), 12.

<sup>29</sup> Hill, *Memoirs of the Revolution*, 6.

**“Push the rebels as far as you may deem convenient”: Huck’s First Raid**

In June 1780, as the rebels met at Bullock’s Creek, the British continued to consolidate their control of South Carolina. Clearly, the backcountry rebels who dispersed the Tory gatherings could not be allowed to go unpunished, especially with the Loyalists a key element of British strategy. The British planned on recruiting, training, and equipping southern Loyalists to take control of occupation, freeing British troops to subdue the rest of the rebellious colonies. Colonel Turnbull, the commander of the British post at Rocky Mount and a New York Loyalist himself, took action. On 11 June, he sent out a detachment to overawe the local population and quiet the countryside. Turnbull also wanted to capture Reverend John Simpson, a Presbyterian minister who supported the Whigs and had encouraged them to attack the Loyalists at Mobley’s. Turnbull chose Captain Christian Huck of Tarleton’s Legion to lead the detachment, with orders to “proceed to the frontier of the Province, collecting all the royal militia” and “push the rebels as far as you may deem convenient.”<sup>30</sup>



Map 2 - York and Chester Districts, 1780<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences, Chiefly of the American Revolution in the South* (Charleston, SC: Walker and James, 1851), 336. Huck’s detachment was composed of his own troop from the British Legion, mounted infantrymen of the New York Volunteers, and local Loyal militia.

It was convenient for Huck to push the rebels far, for he firmly believed that terror and repression were the best ways to compel loyalty to the King and end the rebellion.<sup>32</sup> Huck led his small command to Reverend Simpson's house on lower Fishing Creek, near one of the two churches he served. Huck failed to capture the minister, as Simpson had already fled to North Carolina, but Huck's men burned Lower Fishing Creek Church and plundered and burned Simpson's home.<sup>33</sup> On the same day, a Sunday, Huck's men also killed a local boy named William Strong. Their reasons for killing him were obscure; some sources said Strong was on his way to join the rebels, but the popular version claimed that the lad was only reading the Bible in his barn.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps that was the reason, as Huck and his men reputedly burned any Bibles they came across that contained the Scottish translation of the Psalms. In New York, where Huck and his men had operated in 1778 and 1779, Presbyterians tended to be rebels while Anglicans tended to be loyal, so persecution of Presbyterians may have been second nature to them. Whatever the case, Huck and his men returned to Rocky Mount, thinking their work of suppression well done.

These actions, however, gave the local militiamen new motives for resistance. One was religion. The inhabitants of York and Chester districts were solidly Presbyterian, and the settlers took their faith seriously. There were several local churches, including Bethel, Beersheba, Bullock's Creek, Bethesda, Catholic (or Rocky Creek), and Upper and Lower Fishing Creek.<sup>35</sup> On the frontier, churches were one of the few institutions offering some degree of community unity and cohesion, and were therefore all the more important.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Presbyterians had a tradition of resistance

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<sup>31</sup> Adapted from maps in Robert Mills, *Mill's Atlas: Atlas of the State of South Carolina, 1825* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1980) and Henry Mouzon's *An Accurate Map of North and South Carolina* (London: Robert Sayer and J. Bennett, 1775).

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Conway provides a good commentary on the views of British and Tory officers in "To Subdue America: British Army Officers and the Conduct of the Revolutionary War," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 43, No. 3 (July 1986), 381-407. He generally divides them into 'conciliatory' and 'hard-line' groups; Huck would fall firmly into the hard-line camp. Conway makes prominent use of Banastre Tarleton, Huck's commander, as an example of a hard-liner. Tarleton himself said that "lenity and generosity did not experience in America the merited returns of gratitude and affection" in defense of his hard-line stance; Tarleton, *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781*, 90. Also see Conway's "The Great Mischief Complain'd of: Reflections on the Misconduct of British Soldiers in the Revolutionary War," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 47, No. 3 (July 1990), 370-390 for a perspective on the British enlisted soldiers.

<sup>33</sup> McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780*, 591-592.

<sup>34</sup> Ellet, *Women of the Revolution*, Vol. 3, 226; McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780*, 591; Moore, *Life of General Edward Lacey*, 3-4.

<sup>35</sup> See Brent Holcomb and Elmer Parker, compilers, *Early Records of Fishing Creek Presbyterian Church*. (Greenville, SC: A Press, 1980), and Robert A. Webb, compiler, *History of the Presbyterian Church of Bethel* (Bethel, SC: Presbyterian Church of Bethel, 1938), 10. There was also a Presbyterian church at the Waxhaws.

<sup>36</sup> See James Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), for a discussion of the importance of churches to the Scots-Irish, and George Johnson, *The Frontier in the Colonial South: South Carolina Backcountry, 1736-1800* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997) for the key role churches played

to British authority in both Scotland and Ireland, and persecution of their ministers in the South Carolina backcountry would once again provoke significant resistance. Even before Huck's raid, most Presbyterian ministers leaned towards the Whigs and supported the rebellion. One Loyalist, after being forced to listen to a Presbyterian sermon, pronounced it "stuffed . . . full of Republicanism."<sup>37</sup> Reverend Simpson's encouragements, as well as those of another local preacher, Reverend William Martin, showed that ministers could greatly influence their congregations.<sup>38</sup> Huck's deeds, naturally, gave the ministers new material to sway their parishioners. As Richard Winn recalled, "The people in that quarter, Fishing Creek, immediately cried out they wanted no protection from such a set as burned churches and the word of God. . . .The consequence of this was, Mr. Simpson and about eighty of his church took up arms."<sup>39</sup>

The importance of religion in motivating the militiamen went beyond preachers and churches. Because congregations played such a central social role in the backcountry, lay leaders in the church tended to be leaders in other areas, including the militia. Among the officers at Williamson's Plantation, William Bratton was a member of the Bethesda congregation, William Hill and Andrew Neel of Bethel, John Moffett of Beersheba, Edward Lacey of Bullock's Creek, and John McClure and John Nixon of Fishing Creek.<sup>40</sup> The congregations thus served as fertile recruiting grounds or ready-made military units. Earlier in the war, a Colonel Brandon of Union district, while pursued by Tories, "retired before them until he came within the Bethel congregation, where he recruited his force and turned to meet his pursuers."<sup>41</sup> By persecuting Presbyterian ministers and their congregations, the British were persecuting the local elite, uniting rank-and-file militiamen with their officers on religious grounds, and alienating cohesive groups of potential foes.

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on the frontier. See also David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 605-782, for an overall cultural examination of the backcountry, and Sam Thomas, *The Dye is Cast: The Scots-Irish and Revolution in the Carolina Back Country* (Columbia, SC: the Palmetto Conservation Foundation, 1996), 1-9, for a detailed treatment of York and Chester counties. I use the term 'Scots-Irish' instead of the more common 'Scotch-Irish,' the meaning is identical.

<sup>37</sup> See Durward Stokes, "The Presbyterian Clergy in South Carolina and the American Revolution," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, Vol. 71, No. 4 (October 1970), 270-282. For the Loyalist comment, see Anthony Allaire, "Diary of Lieutenant Anthony Allaire, of Ferguson's Corps" in *King's Mountain and Its Heroes*, by Lyman C. Draper (Cincinnati: Peter G. Thomson, 1881), 512. Allaire had been captured at the Battle of King's Mountain in October of 1780 and forced to listen to a Presbyterian sermon; his full statement was that the sermon was "stuffed as full of Republicanism as their camp is of horse thieves."

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Ellet, *Domestic History of the American Revolution* (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1850), 175-183. Martin was pastor at the Catholic (or Rocky Creek) Presbyterian Church, and had encouraged the Whigs before all three of the small actions against the Tories with fiery pro-rebellion sermons.

<sup>39</sup> Winn, "Notes," 205.

<sup>40</sup> Moss, *Roster of South Carolina Patriots*, *passim*, and Anne Collins, *A Goodly Heritage: History of Chester County, South Carolina* (Columbia: Collins Publications, 1986), 44. I also received some of the congregation information from Sam Thomas, of the Historical Center of York County, in an interview on 13 March 1998.

<sup>41</sup> Saye, "Memoirs of Major Joseph McJunkin," 13.



Huck's burning of Scottish versions of the Bible suggests another factor motivating the rebels, interrelated with religion: ethnicity. York and Chester districts were overwhelmingly Scots-Irish; with many residents, born in Ireland, migrating to the colonies. Most settlers took part in the great overland migration along the Appalachians and down the Shenandoah Valley that peopled the southern backcountry after the French and Indian War. The Scots-Irish had an ethnic as well as religious tradition of independence and resistance to the British, and a tradition of ethnic violence from the border areas between England and Scotland as well as in Ireland.<sup>42</sup> Their ethnicity fostered a strong sense of community on the frontier, and most (but not all) Scots-Irish leaned toward the rebels. Tarleton felt that "the Irish were the most averse of all other settlers to the British government in America."<sup>43</sup>

In other areas of the South Carolina backcountry, where different ethnic groups predominated, support for the rebellion was much weaker. Local Tories tended to be of other ethnic backgrounds, primarily English or German.<sup>44</sup> These ethnic differences reinforced and increased other tensions, particularly those between Whigs and Loyalists. The regular Provincial troops from the northern colonies who made up part of Huck's command were also ethnically different from the Scots-Irish settlers. Just as the use of truly foreign mercenaries – the 'Hessians' from various German principalities – angered many Americans, the use of such outsiders alienated the people of York and Chester and motivated them to resist. A strong combination of religious and ethnic factors thus contributed to the local potential for renewed rebel resistance.

Coupled with these reasons was a desire for vengeance. Huck's unit, the British Legion, gained great notoriety among the locals after Buford's Massacre, earning the nickname 'the Bloody Scout.' Richard Winn recalled that "This same Huck was one of those that cut Buford's men to pieces," and used that fact as justification for his desire to attack Huck's detachment.<sup>45</sup> The rebels similarly detested the Tory militiamen, blaming them for the murder of William Strong. Strong was

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<sup>42</sup> See Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 605-782, and also Maldwyn A. Jones, "The Scotch-Irish in British America." In *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the British Empire*, edited by Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 302.

<sup>43</sup> See Jones, "The Scotch-Irish in British America," 293, which uses ethnicity to reinforce the class and leadership tendencies discussed in Klein, *Unification of a Slave State*, 78-108. The quotation is from Tarleton, *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781*, 86, and refers to the nearby settlement at the Waxhaws. Tarleton meant 'Scots-Irish;' the terms were often used interchangeably.

<sup>44</sup> The Germans between the Broad and Saluda Rivers and the English settlers around Ninety-Six tended to be loyal to Britain or neutral in the war. The most valuable secondary works on loyalism in South Carolina are Robert S. Lambert's *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987) and Robert Barnwell's "Loyalism in South Carolina, 1765-1785" Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University (Durham, NC: 1941), which has specific treatment of loyalism and ethnicity on 135-142.

<sup>45</sup> Winn, "Notes," 206.



related by marriage to the Gaston family, and the Gaston men took up the rebel cause with increased devotion after his murder. Such vengeance could be very personal; a Loyalist leader by the name of Colonel Ferguson was held individually responsible for Strong's death.<sup>46</sup> Details of British and Loyalist 'atrocities,' often embellished, spread among the settlers, encouraging many to strike back.

Men also had begun to gather in arms for protection. Huck and his troops were by far the strongest force in the neighborhood, and the Whigs could do little to oppose them alone or in small groups. Joseph Morrow recalled that "The country became so overthrown with the British and Tories so that all the Whigs were obliged to be in the army for their own safety and the safety of the country."<sup>47</sup> Sam Killough similarly maintained that "a whig was safer in camp than at home."<sup>48</sup> Two camps, centers of patriot resistance, formed by mid-June 1780.

The first, as planned by the militiamen during the Bullock's Creek meeting on 12 June, was at William Hill's ironworks. Men began gathering there soon after the breakup of the first assembly, awaiting news. Around 15 June, the messenger sent to the British post at Camden to ask Lord Rawdon for his terms returned and addressed the gathered crowd. Rawdon's answer, that he would gladly "give paroles & protections to all that choose to become British Subjects," was accompanied by claims that Congress had given up the southern states and Washington's army had been reduced to fugitives hiding in the mountains. These completely untrue assertions might have been an attempt by Rawdon to dupe the rebels into submission. William Hill, among others, disbelieved and violently denied these announcements, and proclaimed his own opposition to surrender. The men immediately elected Hill their colonel, along with another staunch rebel, Andrew Neel. They resolved to continue the fight and establish a permanent camp at the ironworks to collect recruits and supplies. The messenger, seemingly favoring Rawdon's offer, left.<sup>49</sup>

Several factors began to push the men at the ironworks towards active resistance. Aside from the leadership of men like Hill and Neel, and anger over Rawdon's attempt at trickery, Huck's raid on the church was common knowledge, as was the killing of William Strong. News of a new British policy had also reached the frontier by this time, which caused great agitation among the

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<sup>46</sup> The rebel forces, according to the account in Moore, *Life of General Edward Lacey*, 7, killed Ferguson immediately after capturing him at Williamson's Plantation as retribution for William Strong's death. He was not related to the British Major Patrick Ferguson, a Scotsman and the overall organizer of the Loyalist militia, killed at King's Mountain in October. I cannot locate any first name for the local Colonel Ferguson.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Morrow, Federal Pension Account S21892, National Archives Microfilm M804, Roll 1774, Frame 0792.

<sup>48</sup> Sam Killough, in a letter supporting the pension application of John Wallace, Federal Pension Account W955, National Archives Microfilm M804, Roll 2479, Frame 1172.

<sup>49</sup> Hill, *Memoirs of the Revolution*, 6-7.

settlers. On 3 June, just before returning to New York, General Clinton had issued another proclamation on the treatment of former rebels. Far harsher than his original conciliatory policies, the new proclamation ordered people to choose between active Loyalist service and rebellion, with neutrality or inactive parole no longer an option.<sup>50</sup> This led to confusion and fear as to how former rebels would be treated, and resulted in many men leaving their homes and rejoining the active patriot forces. Cornwallis, in charge after Clinton's departure, had also been inconsistent in applying both pardons and punishments. The British occupation was becoming more severe, and initial and sustaining motives for resistance were multiplying.

Patriot refugees in the second growing center of patriot resistance, in North Carolina, also saw and experienced these trends. A number of rebels fled to the comparative safety of the neighboring state in May and June, and this haven allowed them to rest, organize, recruit, and build up supplies.<sup>51</sup> Governor Rutledge himself, still nominally South Carolina's chief executive, was in Hillsborough, North Carolina, attempting to direct the state militia from there. His efforts gave the continued struggle encouragement and legitimacy, and he was able to retain control of some militia forces still in South Carolina.<sup>52</sup> Thomas Sumter, destined for later fame as a partisan leader, also escaped to North Carolina after the destruction of his plantation, and used his reputation for military ability to organize fellow refugees. Many of the York and Chester militia, in fact, gathered under Sumter's command. In mid-June, after Sumter had been 'elected' brigadier general by the men, he established a camp in Mecklenburg County, in the Catawba Indian Nation.<sup>53</sup> Several prominent York and Chester residents and militia leaders, including William Bratton, Richard Winn, and Edward Lacey, joined Sumter's forces.

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<sup>50</sup> Stedman, *The Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War*, 221. Stedman thought the harsh proclamation a bad idea, along with many other contemporaries. For Clinton's defense of his June 3<sup>rd</sup> proclamation, see Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 181; he argued that it was a "most prudent measure" intended to separate hard-core rebels from the general populace. For further discussion, see Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 131, and Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*, 209. The general opinion of historians, as well as contemporaries, is that this proclamation was indeed a mistake.

<sup>51</sup> Louis Franché, "Problems of Command: Cornwallis, Partisans, and Militia, 1780," *Military Review*, Vol. 57 (April 1977), 60-74.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-66 and 72. See also Ferguson, "Functions of the Partisan-Militia," 240-241.

<sup>53</sup> McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780*, 577; Saye, "Memoirs of Major Joseph McJunkin," 13; Winn, "Notes," 203. There is debate about the exact location of the camp, and whether it was in North or South Carolina. It was very near the border, and clearly within the Catawba Indian lands. The Catawba were one of the few tribes who sided with the rebels in the war. See James Merrell, *The Indian's New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact Through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 215-222. For details on Sumter, see Anne Gregorie, *Thomas Sumter* (Columbia, SC: R.L. Bryan Company, 1931), 83-85.

During June 1780, the men in Sumter's camp received welcome news of outside assistance. Continental reinforcements were finally at hand, or at least on the way. General Washington had sent a small army under the command of Baron Johann de Kalb south, proof that Congress and the rest of the states had not abandoned South Carolina. The column had far to travel, having left New Jersey in April and entering North Carolina only in mid-June, but its very existence bolstered rebel morale. Additionally, a small body of North Carolina cavalry under William R. Davie joined Sumter's rebel force.<sup>54</sup> The idea that they were not fighting alone greatly encouraged the Whigs.

With these two growing centers of resistance, then, the local patriots started to turn their potential for resistance into something more concrete. Encouraged to band together and stay together by support for the rebellion, a tradition of violence, common religion and heritage, as well as hope for revenge and approaching reinforcements, the York and Chester militiamen had initial and sustaining motives to resist the British occupation of South Carolina. These factors, when combined with others in the coming weeks, would eventually bring them to battle at Williamson's Plantation.

### **"This Vile Man" : Huck's Speech and Second Raid**

The British and Loyalists, naturally, had no intention of allowing the rebels to reform. Colonel Turnbull, the competent soldier commanding the post at Rocky Mount, understood the importance of the local populace. His orders to Captain Huck covered more than just pushing the rebels; they also mentioned gathering the loyal militia. The British sent out messengers and published handbills to encourage Tory enlistments, with moderate effect. To assist this formation of the Loyal militia, Turnbull sent Huck and his detachment back into York and Chester districts around 15 June. In the words of one local resident, "Hauk [Huck] had come up into this Fishing Creek settlement to offer the people protection," meaning that he wanted to pacify the rebels and activate the Loyalists.<sup>55</sup> Huck set a date for the locals to gather and addressed them.

Huck clearly preferred coercion to conciliation. James Collins, a local youth, recalled that Huck "harangued" the local residents in a "very rough and insulting manner and submitted his

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<sup>54</sup> Tarleton credits news of the approaching Continental force as being a major inspiration to the rebels. See Tarleton, *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781*, 91. See Buchanan, *Road to Guilford Courthouse*, 129, for the dates and locations of de Kalb's force.

<sup>55</sup> John Logan, *A History of the Upper Country of South Carolina, From the Earliest Periods to the Close of the War of Independence*, Vol. 2 (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1980), 62. This work is a collection of local reminiscences and oral traditions compiled in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Huck's name has many alternate spellings, including Hook, Hauk, and Hyuck.

propositions for their acceptance.”<sup>56</sup> Although a few rebels may have been bullied into submission and others encouraged to sign up for the Loyalist militia, Huck alienated more men than he persuaded. After this inflammatory speech, Huck’s detachment did not return to Rocky Mount. They fortified a small post and encamped at White’s Mills on upper Fishing Creek, so as to be in a better position to control the area north of the main British post at Rocky Mount and continue their recruiting efforts.

Over the next few days, the British learned of the rebels gathering at William Hill’s ironworks. They may have also known about Sumter’s camp in North Carolina, but it was much further away than the ironworks, which lay within easy striking range of Huck’s detachment. Such an obvious challenge to British control could not be ignored, and in addition to being a “refuge for runaways” the ironworks also had a “forge for casting [cannon]balls and making rifle guns, etc.”<sup>57</sup> Finally, a small party of rebels from the camp at the ironworks had again attacked a Tory settlement, causing Colonel Turnbull to send Huck out to “do something towards quieting our frontier.”<sup>58</sup>

On about 17 June, Huck and his men ventured forth, reaching the ironworks by 18 June, whereupon they “charged on the ironworks, killed several men, set the works on fire, and reduced them to ashes.”<sup>59</sup> William Hill recalled that Huck and “about 500 Tories came to the Iron works, [and] destroyed all the property they could not carry away. Burned the forge furnace, grist and saw mills . . . & bore away about 90 negroes.”<sup>60</sup> Huck’s detachment scattered the patriot force, destroyed a center of resistance – which had been producing weapons and ammunition – and safely returned to their small post at White’s Mills. In the following weeks, Huck and his men remained active, scouring the country for patriots, suppressing resistance, plundering, and terrorizing the populace. Reporting the action to General Clinton on 30 June, Cornwallis stated that “the dispersion of a party

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<sup>56</sup> James P. Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier*, edited by John Roberts (Clinton, LA: Feliciana Democrat, 1859), 24.

<sup>57</sup> Colonel Turnbull to Lord Cornwallis, 15 June 1780. In Hampton Jarrell, “Huck’s Defeat, A Turning of the Tide.” Unpublished paper prepared for a reenactment of the Battle of Williamson’s Plantation on 17-18 July, 1976 (York County Historical Center, York, South Carolina), 2.

<sup>58</sup> Colonel Turnbull to Lord Cornwallis, 16 June 1780. in *ibid.*, 2. I can find no other references to a rebel attack on any Loyalist settlement at this time; it may have been a non-violent or merely threatening action. Turnbull also commented in this letter that the ‘retreat’ of a British force under Lord Francis Rawdon, which had pulled back from the Waxhaws to Camden, had encouraged the rebels, adding further to his reasons for dispatching Huck. Rawdon’s force was actually on a recruiting mission rather than one of occupation, but Turnbull’s point is valid.

<sup>59</sup> Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 25. Lipscomb, in “South Carolina Revolutionary War Battles,” gives the patriot losses as seven killed, four captured, and an undetermined number wounded, as well as the destruction of the ironworks.

<sup>60</sup> Hill, *Memoirs of the Revolution*, 8-9. Hill was not present when Huck’s force attacked, which casts some doubt on his estimate of the size of the Loyalist force, but he did return to the ironworks shortly after the attack.

of rebels, who had assembled at an iron-work on the north-west border of the province . . . put an end to all resistance in South Carolina.”<sup>61</sup>

Like Buford’s Massacre and the burning of Fishing Creek Church, Huck’s new actions cut two ways. While keeping the local Whigs scared and quiet for the present, the raid on the ironworks gave the rebels new motives for resistance. Though specific details of British and Loyalist actions were often confused, the backcountry population clearly saw that Huck and his men treated residents harshly, burned their homes, and took what they wanted.<sup>62</sup> Huck’s men ruthlessly searched for and ‘suppressed’ rebels, but often neglected to distinguish between Whigs, Loyalists, and those who wanted to remain uninvolved; all received similar treatment. While some, perhaps most, British and Loyalists behaved well towards the inhabitants, those who did not gave the settlers little reason to embrace the King’s peace.

All of these latest actions struck nerves within the community. Huck’s blatant blasphemy and offensive comments offended many of the locals. Joseph McJunkin, a rebel militia officer, recalled that Huck swore “that if the rebels were as thick as trees and Jesus Christ Himself were to command them he would defeat them.”<sup>63</sup> William Hill mentioned Huck’s “impious blasphemy” in claiming that “God almighty had become a Rebel, but if there were 20 Gods on that side, they would all be conquered.”<sup>64</sup> Among the pious Presbyterian inhabitants, rumors of these oaths led to increased Whig sentiment and recruiting. According to McJunkin, when Huck’s speech was reported in Sumter’s camp, “the Presbyterian Irish . . . could stand it no longer. They demanded to be led against this vile man.”<sup>65</sup> Religious motives for fighting multiplied.

Vengeance also continued to play a role in motivating the rebels, increasingly bolstered by material factors. York and Chester districts typified the colonial frontier: almost wholly agricultural and populated by small farmers, Indians, and a few traders.<sup>66</sup> Little industry or commerce existed, and most people worked hard for subsistence and were poor even by the standards of the day. One observer in the years before the war called the residents “new Settlers, extremely poor” while

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<sup>61</sup> Cornwallis to Clinton, 30 June 1780, Tarleton, *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781*, 117.

<sup>62</sup> Hill, *Memoirs of the Revolution*, 9; Ellet, *Women of the American Revolution*, Vol. 3, 182, 218, 227, 271, and 279; Winn, “Notes,” 204. Specific items mentioned as stolen by Huck’s men include horses, livestock, food, bedding, slaves, and valuables.

<sup>63</sup> Saye, “Memoirs of Major Joseph McJunkin,” 14. Saye was a minister himself, and emphasized Huck’s blasphemy and the local reaction to it.

<sup>64</sup> Hill, *Memoirs of the Revolution*, 9.

<sup>65</sup> Saye, “Memoirs of Major Joseph McJunkin,” 14.

another referred to them as "rude inhabitants," lamenting the undeveloped roads and farms of the backcountry.<sup>67</sup> As a comparison, the 1769 taxes levied on all of St. Mark's parish (which included York and Chester districts) added up to less than one twentieth of those on the city of Charleston.<sup>68</sup> The majority of people in the backcountry lived basic lives without material comforts.

Given the settlers' modest conditions, British theft and plundering hurt. A burnt barn or stolen cow might mean the loss of a year's crop and long-term hunger, while a few stolen household items might represent all of a family's possessions. Huck's destruction of the ironworks was also a major blow to the nearby inhabitants. Although its military production made it a legitimate target, its loss left local farmers fearful that they would be unable to get farm tools and basic necessities. Most of the local farmers had done business with Hill, and their future crops would suffer if they were forced to "return to the wooden plough."<sup>69</sup> In addition to the ironworks, Huck's raid destroyed Hill's gristmill, which the settlers had depended upon to grind their wheat and corn. James Collins recalled that the works were "very profitable, both to the proprietor and all the country around," and that its destruction was the main reason why he and his father joined the rebels. Collins also maintained that when the officers in his unit finally decided to attack Huck, they did so to "take vengeance for the burning of the ironworks."<sup>70</sup> Vengeance could thus be an initial, sustaining, and combat motivation, and would have applied to families who had their own property plundered as well as patrons of Hill's ironworks and gristmill. The settlers could ill afford the losses.

The local Whigs also joined the resistance and fought to reclaim or replace their lost material goods, and to acquire new ones. Though discouraged today, taking property or valuables by force in war has been a reason for fighting for as long as men have fought. Plundering occurred in the Revolutionary War, on both sides, especially in the South. In the often-disorganized backcountry

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<sup>66</sup> See Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 605-782. For a comparison, also see Johnson, *The Frontier in the Colonial South*, 39-92, which analyzes the local economy of the Cheraws district, which was to the east of York and Chester districts and more developed.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution; the Journal and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant*, edited by Richard J. Hooker (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 7, and S.F. Warren in a letter to his brother Dr. Warren in London, 22 January 1766, in *The Colonial South Carolina Scene: Contemporary Views, 1697-1774*, edited by H. Roy Merrens (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1977) 233-234.

<sup>68</sup> S.F. Warren to Dr. Warren, 22 January 1766, in *The Colonial South Carolina Scene*, 245. According to the Tax Account of 1769, the amount levied on Charleston was £25,751 while the amount required from St. Mark's Parish was a mere £1,255. St. Mark's included all of the area between the Congaree/Santee River and Lynches Creek, encompassing almost a quarter of the state.

<sup>69</sup> Moore, *Life of General Edward Lacey*, 4. Moore's narrative recounts a prayer later offered by a local minister thanking the Lord for eventual patriot victories and claiming that the destruction of the ironworks was a major inspiration to the Whigs.

<sup>70</sup> Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 25-26.

fighting, plundering had been long practiced against Indians as a form of economic warfare, and carried into the Regulator movement of the 1760's and the rebel suppression of Tories since 1775.<sup>71</sup> Much more recently, speaking of the 3 June skirmish at Mobley's Meeting House, one participant recalled that "the horses forcibly taken from the Whigs . . . [were] re-taken and restored to their owners. Mrs. McClure, among others, recovered three or four of her horses that had been carried off."<sup>72</sup> To the poor residents of the area, horses, slaves, clothing, food, or any other goods could be and often were objectives in their own right.

The rebel militia particularly sought military equipment and weapons. Frequently armed only with basic hunting weapons, they were poorly equipped for heavy fighting. Nearly all of the records left by the patriots mention the pressing need for more swords, rifles, muskets, camp equipment, and ammunition. William Hill claimed that many of his men were "without arms" even the day before the battle at Williamson's.<sup>73</sup> James Collins left a detailed account of rebels making swords out of old saws and melting pewter dishes for bullets.<sup>74</sup> James Moore remembered being "in great want of provision . . . in camp," and men were sent as far off as Hillsborough, North Carolina, in search of gunpowder.<sup>75</sup> Joseph McJunkin recalled seeing men sent out from the patriot camps, "in quest of provisions, [and] arms" and "implements of husbandry . . . converted into swords."<sup>76</sup> Taking weapons and supplies from the enemy was one answer to the Whigs' logistical problem.

Plundering played a role throughout the war in the South. Men often listed what plunder they received after battles, and premature looting later cost the patriots victories when the British rallied and counterattacked while the rebels were rifling the British camps.<sup>77</sup> Nathanael Greene, after assuming in command in the South in late 1780, criticized the militia for excessive stealing and did his best to put a stop to it. In Greene's words, "Plunder and depredation prevail so in every quarter I

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<sup>71</sup> See John K. Mahon, "Anglo-American Methods of Indian Warfare, 1676-1794," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (September 1958) 254-75 for the Indian wars; the 1776 campaign against the Cherokees was won largely by burning and stealing their towns, goods, and crops. Also see Rachel Klein, "Ordering the Backcountry," 661-680 for the Regulator plundering and *Unification of a Slave State*, 102-103 for the significance of captured slaves.

<sup>72</sup> Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 341.

<sup>73</sup> Hill, *Memoirs of the Revolution*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 34-35.

<sup>75</sup> Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 341.

<sup>76</sup> Saye, "Memoir of Major Joseph McJunkin," 13. To paraphrase Isaiah 2:4 and Joel 3:10, when farmers are beating their plowshares into swords and their pruning hooks into spears, they are in dire need of weapons.

<sup>77</sup> See Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 26, 36-38, 43, 46, 55-56. There were definite military rules and customs in the division of plunder; Collins' account also provides an excellent look at the soldier perspective on plunder. The later battles lost as a result of looting were Hanging Rock (6 August 1780) and Hobkirk's Hill (25 April 1781).



am not a little apprehensive all this Country will be laid waste.”<sup>78</sup> Thomas Sumter, the militia general, more pragmatically tried to capitalize on plunder with his ‘Sumter’s Law,’ a system of rewarding enlistees with captured slaves. While Greene and Governor Rutledge later repudiated this practice, it attracted recruits.<sup>79</sup>

Part of the importance of looting lay in the weakness of the state and national governments, as well as that of the American economy. South Carolina, under British occupation, lacked the ability to pay state militia, and Congress had great problems paying its soldiers. Even after the rebel government of the state was reestablished and able to pay its militia, the currency had little value. William Hillborn recalled being paid with “Continental money which was almost totally worthless to me” due to rampant inflation.<sup>80</sup> Regular pay was never a motive for South Carolina’s rebel militia, but at this stage of the war, plunder was.

As a final note on plunder, the rebels tended to be more discriminating at it than the British and Loyalists, and concentrated on enemy troops and Tory families. The British and Loyalists often did not or could not differentiate between Loyalists, active rebels, rebels who had accepted parole, and those who simply wanted to remain uninvolved. The changing mix of sentiment contributed to the confusion, and the rebels generally had the advantage of operating near their own homes. As a result, British and Provincial plundering ordinarily alienated more locals than did rebel looting.

Events in late June also helped to motivate rebel resistance. On 20 June, Whig militia in North Carolina defeated and dispersed a large Tory force of over a thousand men at Ramsour’s Mill, about fifty miles north of York and Chester districts. The Loyalists had risen before the British could support them, and patriot forces had managed to attack first. This disaster for the British encouraged the rebels, and kept North Carolina a secure sanctuary for patriot refugees. The flow of these refugees increased after Huck’s attack on the ironworks, as William Hill and others joined Sumter’s army. While the number of exiled South Carolina militiamen continued to grow, the new Continental army approached, reaching Hillsborough on 22 June. Thus religion, revenge, and plunder further increased the number of rebel motives to join the resistance or remain under arms,

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<sup>78</sup> Nathanael Greene to Thomas Sumter, 8 January 1781, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, Richard Showman, et al., editors (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1976-), Vol. 7, 75.

<sup>79</sup> See Klein, “Frontier Planters and the Revolution,” 64-65 and 69, as well as *Unification of a Slave State*, 104-108. The concept was remarkably tenacious, even after repudiation by the state and continental government; William Hill’s regiment claimed that it was owed 73 large and 3 ½ small Negroes as late as 1782. Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 109.

<sup>80</sup> William Hillborn, Federal Pension S7008, National Archives Microfilm M804, Roll 1280, Frame 0442. South Carolina did make an effort to pay its soldiers after the war, as recorded in the South Carolina Treasury’s *Accounts Audited of Revolutionary Claims Against South Carolina*, edited by A. S. Salley (Columbia, SC: the State Company, 1935) and



and the situation began to look more suitable for striking back. The war was still in grave doubt, especially in South Carolina, but the patriots had new hopes – and reasons – to resist.

### **“Sir, that will be a dear blow to you”: Huck’s Final Raid**

For three weeks after the attack on the ironworks on 18 June, no major activity originated from either the patriot camp on the Catawba or Huck’s camp at White’s Mills. The rebels continued to recruit and collect provisions and equipment. Huck continued to recruit Loyalists, forage for supplies, and scour the countryside for rebels - indirectly helping the rebel recruiting efforts. The presence of the King’s forces, coupled with the hard-line feelings of most British and Loyalist officers, tended to polarize the population. But in terms of active military operations, an informal truce or a kind of standoff prevailed in late June and early July. The patriots were not strong enough to venture back into South Carolina and attack Huck’s force or the British posts, while the British were as yet unwilling or unable to move north and engage the rebels.

Tensions, still building, finally came to a head in mid-July. British actions, perhaps out of frustration at their inability to completely pacify the area, became more oppressive. Colonel Turnbull, writing about the local population, called them “the worst of the creation” and thought “nothing will bring them to reason but severity.”<sup>81</sup> On 11 July, Turnbull reinforced Huck’s detachment and ordered it from its camp at White’s Mills on another raid. Huck and his men were again ordered to look for prominent Whigs, particularly William Bratton, William Hill, and John McClure, who had reputedly returned to their homes to recruit and harvest crops. Turnbull also wanted to make it plain to the locals that the British and Tory forces effectively controlled the area. Failing to find the three men, Huck’s troops continued their custom of looting, but this time went further and abused some local women, most notably the wives of McClure and Bratton. Huck himself was said to have slapped Mary McClure with his sword, to which she responded with the words “Sir, that will be a dear blow to you!”<sup>82</sup> Martha Bratton displayed similar courage by refusing to tell Huck the location of her husband, even after he held a reaping hook to her throat and had to be restrained by his second-in-command.<sup>83</sup> Despite failing to gain any useful information from the two

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*Stub Entries to Indents Issued in Payment of Claims Against South Carolina Growing out of the Revolution* (Columbia, SC: State Company 1930).

<sup>81</sup> Colonel Turnbull to Lord Cornwallis, 8 July 1780, Jarrell, “Huck’s Defeat,” 2.

<sup>82</sup> Ellet, *Women of the Revolution*, Vol. 3, 182.

women, Huck's force succeeded in capturing a few rebels who had left the patriot camp for supplies (two were melting pewter dishes for bullets). Huck and his men then established a temporary camp at the plantation of James Williamson, just north of William Bratton's farm. They planned to execute their prisoners the following morning as reprisals for the rebel activities, and to burn down the Bratton and Williamson plantations.

Several versions of the subsequent events of 11 July have been offered. McClure family tradition held that Mary McClure's daughter went to the patriot camp in North Carolina to get her brothers, John and Hugh, with the news of Huck's raid. Her story would have concentrated on the slapping incident and the prisoners, close members of the family.<sup>84</sup> Bratton family tradition, in contrast, maintained that a family slave went to find William Bratton with word that Huck had threatened Mrs. Bratton and intended to burn the Bratton farm.<sup>85</sup> In both accounts, the patriots quickly set off from their camps to protect their families, rescue the prisoners, and save their homes. It is possible, of course, that two messages were sent and received, giving the rebels all the more reason to act.

Other narratives of the events of 11 July appear murky. Richard Winn, who fought with William Bratton, stated that patriot militiamen followed his lead to attack the British simply because the opportunity to strike Huck's detachment arose.<sup>86</sup> William Hill and Joseph McJunkin claimed that the men rose up mainly because of Huck's blasphemy, and James Collins stated that revenge for the burning of the ironworks was the primary motive of his unit and that the attack on Huck's force was planned for a few days.<sup>87</sup> Though these lack the immediacy of the Bratton and McClure stories, all of the motives and the circumstances of that night must have been involved in the final decision to head south and engage in battle against Huck.

Necessity and survival thus motivated the rebels to end the three weeks of quiet. Huck's force showed no intention of leaving York and Chester districts, and had become more repressive and violent. Huck's abuse of women, against all of the customs and propriety of the day, even for

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<sup>83</sup> Unidentified newspaper clipping, Draper Manuscripts, South Carolina Collection, 1UU, Frame 113. There are numerous versions of the story of what happened at the Bratton house; Huck was also said to have put a rope around Martha Bratton's neck. Huck's second in command, a local Tory from Camden named John Adamson, reputedly kept him from seriously injuring Mrs. Bratton.

<sup>84</sup> Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 342; McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780*, 594. Two of the prisoners were James McClure and Edward Martin, brother and brother-in-law of John and Hugh McClure.

<sup>85</sup> Wade Fairey, *Historic Brattonsville A Wedge of County History* (McConnells, SC: York County Historical Commission, 1993), 14. The slave's name was Watt.

<sup>86</sup> Winn, "Notes," 204-205. Winn's account tends to be self-serving.

the frontier, greatly angered the settlers. His planned executions of the relatives of Whig leaders also caused great concern, especially as the Loyalists were clearly capable of summary executions after the killing of William Strong.<sup>88</sup> Finally, the rebels believed the threats to the Bratton and Williamson plantations, since Huck and his men had shown themselves quite willing to burn homes and settlements. For William Bratton, "The British camp fires were within sight of his own house, the residence of his family."<sup>89</sup> The rebels had to act quickly, to protect their families and property, and they knew it.

Ironically, the night's delay was a major error for the British. By postponing the executions and destruction, Huck and his men remained away from their fortified camp at White's Mills longer than necessary, and this left them vulnerable. Perhaps the lack of recent resistance had made them complacent; Tarleton later blamed Huck for "placing his party carelessly" and in a "negligent situation."<sup>90</sup> Had they conducted their business promptly, the rebels might have had nothing to rescue, and while there would be more reason for eventual revenge, there would have been no immediate crisis. Huck's overnight delay gave the Whigs an opportunity, another motive to strike.

Exactly how much the rebel militia understood this opportunity is not clear. By 11 July, the rebels probably knew that Huck's force was small enough to attack successfully. Huck had gathered the locals together to give his speech, revealing the strength of his detachment, and the rebels often had surprisingly good intelligence. Huck had been operating in the local area for a quite a while, giving the Whigs further opportunity to gauge the size of his force. The patriots may also have noted that Huck's Loyalist contingent had decreased; many of the Tory militiamen had lost interest in active service or dispersed to their homes. Estimates of Huck's force at Williamson's, on 12 July, were all around or slightly over one hundred, far smaller than when it had attacked the ironworks on 18 June.<sup>91</sup> This was a force the rebels might be able to handle. Finally, Huck's men, far from

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<sup>87</sup> Hill, *Memoirs of the Revolution*, 9; Saye, "Memoirs of Major Joseph McJunkin," 14; Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 25-26.

<sup>88</sup> Exactly who was a prisoner is difficult to determine; sources differ. James McClure and Edward Martin are common to most accounts, while others include three older men (including one "devoutly pious old gentleman" engaged by Bratton to care for his family while he was away) and Hugh Bratton, William's cousin. McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780*, 599; Moore, *Life of General Edward Lacey*, 7; Saye, "Memoirs of Major Joseph McJunkin," 14; Winn, "Notes," 206; and Logan, *History of the Upper Country of South Carolina*, 61.

<sup>89</sup> Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 342.

<sup>90</sup> Tarleton, *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781*, 93.

<sup>91</sup> Estimates in both primary and secondary sources range from 50 to 900; these figures represent my estimate based on all available sources. For a few of these, see Allaire, "Diary," 500; Jarrell, "Huck's Defeat," 2; Winn, "Notes," 205-207; McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780*, 595-602; Moore, *Life of General Edward Lacey*, 6-8; and Hill, *Memoirs of the Revolution*, 9. My estimate tends to agree with that of Tarleton in *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781*, 93, as 25 British Legion dragoons, 25 mounted New York Volunteers, and about 65 Tory militia.

Colonel Turnbull's battalion at Rocky Mount, could count on no outside assistance. Huck's exposed position, unfortified campsite, and smaller force would have reduced the traditional rebel fear of regular troops, and improved the opportunity to attack.

This motive was further magnified by a rebel strength: detailed knowledge of the local roads, swamps, and forests. Almost all of the men who left Sumter's camp in North Carolina to attack Huck – 54 of the 59 whose homes are known – hailed from York or Chester districts.<sup>92</sup> The local Whigs and made great use of their familiarity with the area and its inhabitants in the march to Huck's encampment and in their assault on it. Huck's location in the rebels' home territory improved their opportunity to strike.

More than necessity and opportunity, however, the most important motive for the patriots to fight was that they had come together as a cohesive group, and fought for each other. Their relationships as family, neighbors, friends, and comrades in arms made the final difference in their readiness to fight. Modern studies of military psychology place great emphasis on interpersonal relations between soldiers and cohesion in units, particularly within the small 'primary group' of each man's close associates.<sup>93</sup> While no comparable term was used in 18<sup>th</sup> century America for group cohesion, the backcountry settlers understood the terms 'kin' and 'company.' When militia gathered, they 'embodied,' meaning that they formed themselves into an effective group and prepared for action.<sup>94</sup>

After weeks together in the field and under stress, the South Carolina militia who fought at Williamson's Plantation fit this description. Most had known each other even before the British invasion, and many were related – brothers, fathers and sons, cousins, uncles, and in-laws. Before leaving the rebel camp, William Bratton "convened his neighbors . . . and they moved off with all

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<sup>92</sup> See Appendix 2, Roster of Patriot Militiamen at Williamson's Plantation.

<sup>93</sup> The literature on group cohesion in war is quite large. For psychological works, see Gregory Belenky, editor, *Contemporary Studies in Combat Psychiatry* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987); Samuel Stouffer, et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949); and Reuben Gal and A. David Mangelsdorff, editors, *Handbook of Military Psychology* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1991). Kellett's *Combat Motivation* is also a good recent synthesis, and though flawed in terms of unreliable statistics, S.L.A. Marshall's *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978; originally published 1947) is still valuable. For cohesion specifically in the Revolutionary War see Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 503-504, and "Why Men Fought in the American Revolution."

<sup>94</sup> According to Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (London: W. Strachan, 1755; originally published 1755; reprint, Hildesheim, Germany: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung 1968), the term 'cohesion' was used more in scientifically, and could mean "The act of sticking together" or a "State of union or inseparability." While both of those meanings are appropriate in a military context, the more common terms of 'kin' ("Relatives; those who are of the same race") and 'company' ("a body of men" or "so many as are under one captain") were more widely used in the sources. For the term 'embody,' also frequently used, see Richard Lederer, *Colonial American English* (Essex, CT: Verbatim, 1985).

possible despatch, to prevent the mischief, as far as practicable.”<sup>95</sup> John McClure had his brother Hugh with him as he went to rescue his brother and brother-in-law, two of Huck’s prisoners. Edward Lacey, formerly an indentured servant in the Adair family and like a son to them, fought alongside the Adair brothers. Gills, Gastons, Moores, Morrows, Neels, and Wallaces all fought with and for each other. Their ties of family and friendship reinforced all of the other motives, especially their shared Presbyterianism and Scots-Irish heritage.

In terms of cohesion, the three weeks spent in camp was not wasted time, but critically important. As the larger assembly of rebels, made up of smaller family and neighbor groups, lived together in close contact and in some danger, they must have coalesced into a more effective military force. The leaders would have had the opportunity to work with their men and get to know them better, and the same would have held true of the men themselves. Three weeks can be a very long time under certain circumstances, and some of the rebels had been under arms together for far longer. This period would also have served to winnow out those lukewarm towards the rebellion or unsure about their own motivation. By mid-July, the men of York and Chester were ready to fight.

Finally, the excitement of an impending attack on the British generated a few new recruits. On the day before the battle, several leaders “beat up” the districts for additional men, using the prospect of imminent action to further their efforts.<sup>96</sup> John and Henry Bishop, fleeing their homes in Chester County, decided the day before the battle to join the patriot forces “in pursuit of the enemy” to ensure the safety of their women and children, and others also joined as the Whigs marched towards Huck’s camp.<sup>97</sup> While these men would not have had the advantage of time with the main body of Whigs, most were still from the area, possibly known by the rest, and may have joined in smaller groups of their own. The rebel leaders were fortunate to be able to capitalize on a local ‘rage militaire’ and increasing their force at the last minute.<sup>98</sup>

Many factors, therefore, came together on 11 July. Older initial and sustaining motives such as support for the rebellion and the habit of violence united with more recent factors including religion, ethnicity, revenge, and plunder, bringing a sizable rebel force into the field. When the necessity of defending against Huck’s actions and the opportunity of his exposed position combined

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<sup>95</sup> Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 337. The quotation implies that there were men in the camp who were not Bratton’s neighbors and did not accompany him to attack Huck.

<sup>96</sup> Moore, *Life of General Edward Lacey*, 4.

<sup>97</sup> John Bishop, Federal Pension Application S9297, National Archives Microfilm M804, Roll 246, Frame 392.

<sup>98</sup> For a discussion of ‘rage militaire’ and early excitement and enthusiasm in the Revolutionary War as a whole, see Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 25-54.

with the increased cohesion of the men in the rebel camps, the patriot forces were finally motivated for combat – they were at last ready to strike back, and the time for action was at hand.

### **“All Night” : The March to Williamson’s Plantation**

“And so we set out and marched all night,” recounted Richard Winn, summing up probably the most difficult part of the operation. For the rebels, covering the twenty miles from their base in North Carolina to Huck’s encampment was a major undertaking, and deciding to attack only a day before the battle left little time for planning. William Bratton and John McClure set off from Sumter’s camp upon receiving the news of Huck’s actions. Richard Winn recalled that he was near a ford of the Catawba River when he “determined to stop and see if they could get as many men as would fight Huck and his party.”<sup>99</sup> James Collins claimed that he and John Moffett’s men met “several parties” at a “time and place appointed for a rendezvous” before the battle.<sup>100</sup> The fact that all of these parties – at least three or four – managed to converge on Huck’s camp by dawn, after marching through twenty miles of wilderness, was remarkable.

Many of the men were eager to advance and fight, but others still had to be convinced. Richard Winn remembered a good number “loth” to fight; he could convince only “130 . . . to follow and try the business.”<sup>101</sup> As one recollection wrote of William Bratton, “He mustered but one hundred and twenty-five men, and in the march fifty of them dropped off.”<sup>102</sup> Other sources mentioned “great confusion and excitement,” with one group of men getting lost and ending up in Charlotte, North Carolina, forty miles to the northeast.<sup>103</sup> By all accounts, the initial patriot force shrank significantly overnight, probably from men deciding to leave as well as losing their way.

Other circumstances also thinned the rebel ranks. Confusion about the location of Huck’s men, who were thought to be at White’s Mills, Bratton’s plantation, or Williamson’s plantation, contributed, and may have resulted in the absence of a few groups at the battle. Many of the men,

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<sup>99</sup> Winn, “Notes,” 204-205.

<sup>100</sup> Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 26. Collins’ account of the march is less detailed than his description of the battle; he was sixteen at the time and was probably far more excited by the fighting than the approach. His statement implies that there was some planning and coordination that enabled several groups of rebels to converge on Williamson’s Plantation, but this idea (though possible) is not well supported by the other sources.

<sup>101</sup> Winn, “Notes,” 204-205.

<sup>102</sup> Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 337.

<sup>103</sup> Moore, *Life of General Edward Lacey*, 4-5. Moore’s account suggests that a mistaken or misunderstood order caused a third of the rebel force to disperse or get lost.

going into combat for the first time, most likely felt apprehensive, and some who wanted to fight at first may have changed their minds over the course of the night. Finally, the night itself, or at least a large part of it, was quite dark. The moon was waxing, and past the first quarter, but would have provided light only until it set at about one-thirty in the morning on 12 July. Of course, the forest cover of the backcountry would have made it far darker. First light came at about four-thirty, so absolute darkness reigned for at least three hours after the moon set.<sup>104</sup> Taken as a whole, these factors could easily have led some groups astray and reduced the rebel force. Moreover, if a man or group of men dropped off, whatever the reason, there was little to stop them.

Enough men to offer battle, however, did make it through the long night's march. Knowledge of the local terrain proved critical for the Whigs, as did the sympathy of the population. Several local families assisted the rebels with information about Huck. The Adairs, who had two sons with the militiamen, gave directions to one group of rebels, and a local girl named Mary Gill helped some of the men find their way.<sup>105</sup> The fact that the militiamen were all mounted was also crucial, for their horses gave them the mobility to get to the battlefield and left them fresh enough to attack the British once they got there.<sup>106</sup> The weather did not hinder the rebel movements, and was most likely clear.<sup>107</sup> The leaders made the ride along with their men, and encouraged them along the way – at times stopping to discuss the situation, and resolving to continue on. William R. Davie, a North Carolina militia leader, later commented on the militia, saying that “in those times [it] was absolutely necessary” for the officers to explain things to their men and obtain their approval.<sup>108</sup> Given this democratic character of the Whig militia, the officers must have done a good deal of

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<sup>104</sup> Mark A. Haney, *Skyglobe 3.5* (KlassM Software, 1992). The Morehead Planetarium staff at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill calculated the phase of the moon for me by using this computer program. Based on the location of Charlotte, NC (the nearest modern city), the moon rose at 3:25 PM on the 11<sup>th</sup> and set at 1:32 AM on the 12<sup>th</sup>; it was a waxing Gibbous moon and provided 79% illumination. Sunrise was at about 5:20 AM; some lightening of the sky (referred to as Beginning Morning Nautical Twilight, or BMNT) would have begun about forty minutes prior.

<sup>105</sup> Ellet, *Women of the Revolution*, Vol. 3, 279. Mary Gill had three brothers in the militia; in 1782 she married another militiaman, John Mills, who fought at Williamson's Plantation and may have been one of the men she guided that night.

<sup>106</sup> Many works emphasize the fact the militiamen were mounted. See Clyde Ferguson, “Carolina and Georgia Patriot and Loyalist Militia in Action, 1778-1783,” in *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution*, edited by Jeffrey Crow (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 174-179, and Jac Weller, “Irregular But Effective: Partizan Weapons and Tactics in the American Revolution, Southern Theater,” *Military Affairs*, Vol. 21, Issue 3 (Autumn, 1957), 118-131. For the critical importance of the militia being fresh for the fight, see S.L.A. Marshall, *The Soldier's Load and the Mobility of a Nation* (Quantico, VA: the Marine Corps Association, 1980; originally published 1950).

<sup>107</sup> No source mentioned the weather, so it was probably clear, or at least not raining. Wet weather was a far more important consideration in that era of loose gunpowder and flintlock muskets, so had it been raining or excessively damp, that would have been mentioned – and firing in the battle would have been difficult.



explaining that night. Had there not been help along the way and so many solid reasons for the men to continue, the attack might have faltered in the swamps and darkness.

Since the rebel officers played a key role in motivating their men on the march, the question of who commanded the rebels arises. Unfortunately, sources conflict. Thomas Sumter, the Whigs' acknowledged leader, was not present. He remained in North Carolina, recruiting. All of the officers who left memoirs either stated or implied that they were in charge. William Hill and Richard Winn both claimed to have been in command, while soldiers' accounts listed William Bratton, John McClure, and Edward Lacey as commanders.<sup>109</sup> James Collins, the only private who left a detailed record, fought under John Moffett and mentioned no other officers. One militiaman recalled that "Lacey joined them on the way, and acted in the fight as a private. Winn was with the Whigs . . . as a private."<sup>110</sup> Going into combat, as at meetings and in camp, the mantle of command often depended upon men's opinions. Their votes reflected the officers' popularity and abilities, and the leaders had to concern themselves with their own example and image. Furthermore, the leader of any one militia group could not control other leaders or other units. Therefore, on the night of the march and in the battle, each company probably acted independently. There was coordination among the rebel militia companies, but no overall command.

Fortunately for the Whigs, Huck's position made a decentralized attack feasible. Huck's men camped in a fenced lane outside the Williamson house, on the road leading south to the Bratton farm. Although British leaders later claimed Huck was surprised because he was "camped in an unguarded manner," American sources stated that sentinels were out but "fast asleep."<sup>111</sup> One rebel claimed William Bratton personally "reconnoitered the position of the enemy, and actually passed through their line of sentinels, satisfying himself of their positions and negligence."<sup>112</sup> There probably were a few sentries, possibly not far enough out from the camp to be effective. At any rate, Huck's men raised no alarm, and the patriots arrived at Williamson's in time to dismount and

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<sup>108</sup> William R. Davie, *The Revolutionary War Sketches of William R. Davie*, edited by Blackwell Robinson (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1976), 14. Despite the title, this work is Davie's journal of the war.

<sup>109</sup> Ellet, *Women of the American Revolution*, *passim*; McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780*, 595-602; and Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, *passim*, all state that Bratton and McClure were in charge; in the various survivors' pension accounts, five different men (Bratton, Neel, Lacey, Winn, and Moffett) are said to have been in command.

<sup>110</sup> Logan, *History of the Upper Country of South Carolina*, 63.

<sup>111</sup> Tarleton, *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781*, 92-93; Logan, *History of the Upper Country of South Carolina*, 61. Tarleton's memoirs and the letters Cornwallis wrote to Clinton (particularly that of 15 July, as listed in Tarleton, *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781*, 121) blame the loss at Williamson's Plantation mainly on Huck's negligence and lack of security. Also see Allaire, "Diary," 500.

<sup>112</sup> Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 337.



deploy, partially surround the sleeping enemy, and wait for dawn. Estimates of the final rebel strength varied greatly, but there were most likely two hundred militiamen preparing to attack Huck's camp at dawn on 12 July 1780.<sup>113</sup>

### **The 'Bloody Scout' and the New York Volunteers: Provincial Regulars**

Before describing the attack itself, however, there is another key element of the story. What about Huck's men who were asleep in the camp? What motives compelled them to take up arms for the King? None of them were British in the strict sense – Huck's regulars were Provincials from the northern colonies and his militiamen were South Carolina Tories. These men had numerous and complex reasons for serving and fighting for England, just as the rebels did for their cause, and study of the Loyalist motives provides additional insights as to the outcome and significance of the battle.

Loyalism continues to challenge historians. The tendency of both American and English historians to ignore the Loyalists hampered efforts to understand and explain Loyalism until the turn of the twentieth century. Since then, however, historians have devoted much attention to Loyalism, especially in the last thirty years. Much of their analysis, in fact, has been focused on loyalist motivations. One explanation has suggested that Loyalists tended to be cultural, economic, or political minorities in need of British help and protection. Another, while not completely rejecting that idea, has maintained that Loyalism was a more individual decision, and that fear of material or spiritual loss was its great unifying theme. Other arguments have sought to divide Loyalism into categories, such as that based on pro-British principles, a desire for accommodation with Britain, or uncompromising doctrine. Finally, several numerical and statistical studies have sought to find exactly what proportion of the population were loyal. Unfortunately, most studies concentrate on the years leading up to the war or the politics behind the fighting, as opposed to the Loyalist soldiers.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Winn, "Notes," 205 gives the total number of rebels as 130; Hill, *Memoirs of the Revolution*, 9, gives 133. Despite this apparent agreement, other (largely secondary) sources vary widely in their estimates of the rebel strength, from 75 to 400. For example, Moore, *Life of General Edward Lacey*, 5, gives 350 as the number. This issue is further confused by the possible tendency of sources to list only the number of men in their own small group or company, as opposed to the entire rebel force. Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 25, says John Moffett's force was originally mustered as 70 men, and his was one of four or five patriot groups. Based on Lawrence Babits' study of numbers present for American soldiers (both militia and Continental) at the Battle of Cowpens, there were anywhere from two to twenty-four times the number of soldiers at the battle as pension applications filed. For militia soldiers, the ratios tended to be higher. See Babits, *Devil of a Whipping*, 32. Based on a conservative (if somewhat arbitrary) ratio of five to one, and with the knowledge that I have found forty-six pension applications from men who fought at Williamson's, the total number of patriots was probably around two hundred.

<sup>114</sup> See William Nelson, *The American Tory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), for the argument that the loyalists were generally minorities; Wallace Brown, *The Good Americans: the Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York:

One kind of Loyalist soldiery, Provincial regulars, made up a sizable portion of the British Army in America. In the war's latter stages, the number of men in Provincial regiments fighting for England outnumbered those serving in Washington's main Continental Army.<sup>115</sup> The Provincials were similar to the regular British Army in terms of organization and discipline, and indeed the backcountry people made little distinction between Loyalist regulars and British regulars. The Provincials made an important contribution to the British war effort, often overlooked.

The large use of Provincials was due partly to problems with recruiting in England. Despite such methods as convincing youths fresh off the farm that army life was wonderful, taking the sweepings of the jails and taverns, and forcing the indigent into service, the British had trouble enlisting men for the fairly unpopular war in America.<sup>116</sup> This also led the British government to pay for German mercenaries, but more importantly to an increasing dependence on regular Loyalist troops, especially after French entry into the war in 1777. While some of the dubious recruiting methods used in England may have been used for the Provincial regiments, the war was much closer and more relevant to Americans than to the average Englishman. According to Lieutenant Colonel Edward Winslow, the muster-master-general of the Provincials, "inducements to engage" in the Provincials consisted mainly of "The pleasure of gratifying revenge for recent persecutions and injuries, or a flush of romantic military ardor."<sup>117</sup> Thus desires for revenge for Whig abuses and for adventure often motivated Provincials initially.

Another inducement for Provincial service was the pay, as the British government was fully prepared by 1777 to use the King's shilling to raise and support Provincial units. Military pay, in solid coin as opposed to paper money, dependably reached the Provincials, in contrast to American soldiers. Privates could earn sixpence a day, not counting enlistment bonuses, which could be as

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Morrow, 1969), for other motivations, particularly chapter four, "The Welter of Conflicting Motives;" and Robert Calhoun, *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America* for subdivisions in the types of loyalism. For loyalist numbers, see Wallace Brown, *The King's Friends: the Composition and Motives of the American Loyalist Claimants* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1965). Brown based his analysis and findings on claims presented to the British government after the war, and received some criticism for his techniques. See Paul Smith, "The American Loyalists: Notes on Their Organization and Numerical Strength," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XXV, No. 2 (April 1968), 259-277. Finally, for one of the few modern works on the military aspects of the Loyalists and how the British used them as soldiers, see Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*.

<sup>115</sup> Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 77. This statement is based on the Continental soldiers with General Washington in the main Continental Army, who generally numbered less than 10,000.

<sup>116</sup> See Sylvia Frey, *The British Soldier in America: A Social History of Military Life in the Revolutionary Period* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 3-22, and Mark Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1994), 923-924, under the heading "Recruiting in Great Britain."

<sup>117</sup> Edward Winslow, in a letter to a Major Barry, 13 November 1778. Cited in W.O. Raymond, "Loyalists in Arms," *New Brunswick Historical Society Collections*, V (1899), 192. Winslow was appointed to his position by General Sir William Howe on 30 July 1776, as the first Provincial units were being formed, and remained in charge of the Provincials' muster rolls for the British Army throughout the war.

much as two or three pounds sterling. Clothing, equipment, and food were also included. Finally, after 1779, officers in Provincial units were entitled (along with their pay, a good deal better than that of the privates) to rank equally with British officers and be eligible for benefits if wounded or upon retirement. Similar benefits could be extended to the troops if Provincial units were accepted into the 'Regular Establishment' of the British Army. In short, the material benefits of service to the British were considerable, and had the potential to attract many recruits, particularly among refugees or those suffering from the dislocations of the war.<sup>118</sup>

Other incentives also applied to the Provincials. Status and rank could be gained from serving with the British, and the Loyalist population held Provincial officers in high regard. Early in the war, a few men who felt that they were slighted by the rebel government went over to the enemy out of frustration or for higher rank, and as the British increased the size of the Provincial Corps plenty of regiments needed officers.<sup>119</sup> Personal loyalty may have been a factor for some men, as specific officers with warrants recruited Provincial units.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, service in certain Provincial units may have seemed easy duty, as recruiters told enlistees they would have to serve only near their homes or in their particular colonies. Finally, some men served in the Provincials simply because they did not believe in the rebellion and wanted the colonies to remain under Royal control. While the presence of the British Army or perceptions of eventual British victory often affected peoples' loyalty, some men were against the rebellion from the start and truly supported the British cause.

Many motives thus inspired men to join the Provincials, and often differed with individual units. Of the many Provincial regiments formed during the war, Huck's detachment at Williamson's Plantation contained elements of two: the British Legion and the New York Volunteers. The first, the British Legion, was formed during the British occupation of Philadelphia in 1778.<sup>121</sup> This corps,

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<sup>118</sup> See pay table in Raymond, "Loyalists in Arms," 221, for a by-rank listing of Provincial pay; the enlistment bonus amount is from a recruiting poster for John Simcoe's regiment in John Simcoe, *Simcoe's Military Journal* (New York: Bartlett & Welford, 1844), viii. The change in policy benefiting Provincial officers, which redressed a grievance dating at least from the French and Indian War, is in a letter from Lord George Germain (the British Secretary of State for the American Colonies) to General Clinton, 23 January 1779, in Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 399-400. A more general commentary on the changes in Provincial administration is in Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 32-36, 47-48, 60-78, and 86-99.

<sup>119</sup> The most famous of these, of course, was Benedict Arnold; there were, however, several backcountry South Carolina loyalists who sided with the British out of anger at not being commissioned in the rebel forces. See Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 28.

<sup>120</sup> This practice was referred to as recruiting 'for rank.' See Raymond, "Loyalists in Arms," 200-201, and Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 60-79.

<sup>121</sup> Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 110-111. A legion was a mixed unit of infantry and cavalry or dragoons, or light cavalymen, which was very flexible tactically. Strictly speaking, a dragoon rides to the battle and dismounts to fight, while a cavalryman fights from horseback, but the terms were largely interchangeable during the War for Independence. Dragoons were generally armed with sabers and short muskets or pistols. The third troop of the Legion, which joined in

so named since General Clinton encouraged recent immigrants who still maintained their British identity and allegiance to join, grew from three pre-existing Loyalist cavalry units. The Legion, with three troops of dragoons and four companies of infantry, finished organizing in New York City in July of 1778 and operated around the city before embarking for the southern campaign with General Clinton in late 1779.<sup>122</sup> In addition to the 'British' members, the Legion contained many American Loyalists from Philadelphia and New York and later recruited southerners as replacements.

Several factors motivated men to join the British Legion above and beyond those for Provincials in general. Ethnic links between recent immigrants and the British played a role. Loyalist refugees and militia units adopted into the Legion obviously supported the British cause. The economic turmoil of the war made the pay and allowances of a Provincial regular attractive; Christian Huck, for example, had been a lawyer in Philadelphia before leaving with the British in the summer of 1778, and may have joined to regain the income and status he gave up for his loyalty.<sup>123</sup> After the Legion's formation, its participation in operations around New York and living in the close quarters of a military unit gave its members unity and cohesion, which served as sustaining motives. By the summer of 1780, in South Carolina, the Legion had become elite: they were experienced and effective, well equipped, and aggressively led.

The New York Volunteers were originally raised by retired British officers in Halifax, Nova Scotia, from recent immigrants and refugees from New England. After participating in the 1776 campaigns around New York City, the Volunteers merged with three locally raised battalions. Oliver DeLancey, a prominent and wealthy New Yorker, received a warrant to recruit a brigade of Loyalists from Queens and Suffolk Counties on Long Island. Other Provincial units competed for recruits, as DeLancey issued specific orders forbidding any recruiting without a warrant.<sup>124</sup> Patronage from DeLancey's family contributed to recruiting for the Volunteers, as did the prestige of receiving commissions in his brigade. Bounties and pay also helped convince rank-and-file recruits to enlist, as did the prospect of being used only for local defense – many members of the Volunteers

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April of 1778 under Captain Thomas Sandford, had been known as the Bucks County Light Dragoons. This was the troop, under the later command of Christian Huck, which would take part in the Battle of Williamson's Plantation.

<sup>122</sup> See Thomas H. Raddall, "Tarleton's Legion" *Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections*, XXVIII (1949), 4-5, and Robert D. Bass, *The Green Dragoon: the Lives of Banastre Tarleton and Mary Robinson* (New York: Holt and Company, 1957), 46-55. Bass' work, though a biography of Tarleton, also deals with the formation of the British Legion.

<sup>123</sup> Lorenzo Sabine, *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1864), 552-553.

<sup>124</sup> William Kelby, editor, *Orderly Book of the Three Battalions of Loyalists Commanded by Brigadier-General Oliver DeLancey, 1776-1778* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1917), 9. Warrants, documents issued to men raising units 'for rank,' allowed for greater control of both recruits and recruiting funds. Prospective officers were granted warrants to raise a specific number of men, and were rewarded with personal commissions, bonuses, and the possibility of selling lower-ranking commissions to others.

were not at all pleased when ordered south in 1780.<sup>125</sup> When the brigade was completed, it contained chiefly local residents, with a few Canadian veterans and Loyalist refugees from Connecticut.<sup>126</sup> Despite this initial heterogeneity, by 1780 the Volunteers had been working and fighting together since the unit was formed, and were well trained and cohesive. The detachment of mounted Volunteers with Huck were members of Colonel George Turnbull's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion.

The Provincials at Williamson's Plantation, then, had motives for service both varied and generally different from those of the rebel militiamen. They joined the Provincials to support the crown, for material gain, for rank and privilege, desiring revenge or adventure, and out of necessity. These men remained in British service for much the same reasons, and because of the discipline and control that the service exerted upon them after enlistment. By the time they reached the South Carolina backcountry, they had also formed ties of friendship and familiarity within their units, and become cohesive soldiers. The British Legion and New York Volunteers had proven themselves in the initial campaigns in South Carolina, even in combat, but Huck had a limited number of them, and their motivation was about to be put to a severe test.

### **"Principle, Property, and Fear": The Loyal Militia**

Most of Huck's force was composed not of Provincial regulars but of Loyalist militia from South Carolina.<sup>127</sup> The British government based much of its strategy in the South on the expectation that Loyalism was strong there, and its plans depended on significant military assistance from the Tory population. The British occupation of South Carolina illustrated this point, as the British rarely attempted extensive occupation of conquered territory during the war. In the only other instance, General Howe had attempted to garrison New Jersey with small detachments after driving George Washington's army from New York City in 1776. Howe had not destroyed the Continental Army, however, and Washington rallied his men and defeated the scattered British and

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<sup>125</sup> Thomas Jones, *History of New York During the Revolutionary War*, ed. Edward DeLancey (New York: New York Historical Society, 1879), 264-267. Jones was a judge and a prominent loyalist from New York City. As a fourth component, the brigade may have included a few unwilling recruits - former rebels who were captured in the fighting around New York in 1776 and were forced to serve to avoid incarceration in prison ships. Also see Philip Ranlet, *The New York Loyalists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 107, 112-113, and 119.

<sup>126</sup> Ranlet, *The New York Loyalists*, 68 and 111. See also Raymond, "Loyalists in Arms," 204-205.

<sup>127</sup> The best secondary works specifically on the South Carolina Loyalists, as previously mentioned, are Robert S. Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution*, and Robert Barnwell, "Loyalism in South Carolina, 1765-1785." Also useful are Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 73-90, and Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*.

Hessian forces at Trenton and Princeton. These losses effectively drove the British from New Jersey, and they did not again attempt to occupy large areas prior to the southern campaign.

But the British believed that large numbers of Loyalists in the South would rise up to help them, and saw this as a critical difference between the northern and southern colonies. As the plan went, after the British Army defeated the Continental forces and dispersed the rebel militia, their small posts and dispersed detachments would be secure. The local Loyalist militia could gradually take over the occupation duties, and this would free the British and Provincial regulars for service elsewhere. Thus with the help of the southern Loyalists, the British planned to gradually recover the colonies, starting with Georgia and South Carolina and moving northward.

The British government placed so much faith in the southern Loyalists because it believed, on the advice of supposedly knowledgeable men, that Tory sentiment was very strong in the South. Former royal Governors and other British officials constantly besieged London with suggestions for new offensives to support reputed concentrations of Loyalists. In the case of South Carolina, the former Royal Attorney General, James Simpson, sent reports to both Lord Germain, the British Secretary of State for the American Colonies, and General Clinton, detailing the situation in the colony. Simpson's reports, combined with many others, helped to propel Great Britain into adopting the southern strategy.<sup>128</sup> Whether or not such dependence on the Loyalists was justified, Simpson's letters revealed several of the motives that encouraged South Carolinians to join the Tory militia.

Simpson interviewed several of his "former acquaintances" from the South Carolina backcountry while at Savannah, Georgia, in late 1779. Many of them spoke of their strong "general resentment" against the rebel government, which had made them "objects of almost unrelenting persecution" after it gained control of the state in 1775. This desire for revenge was the strongest motive that the frontier Loyalists had, in Simpson's view, and he described them as "most violent in their enmity to those by whom they had been oppressed."<sup>129</sup> Numerous other sources mention this desire for revenge as a key factor in Loyalists eventually turning out in arms for the British, for mistreatment and suppression of Tories by the rebels had been common. Alexander Burnside of Camden was "molested" and "frequently harass'd" for refusing to take an oath to the rebel government. James Miller, arrested several times and put in irons, claimed he "suffer'd greatly

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<sup>128</sup> See James Simpson, "James Simpson's Reports on the Carolina Loyalists, 1779-1780," ed. Alan Brown, in *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. XXI, No. 4 (November 1955), 513-519. Other prominent officials who proposed campaigns based on support for the Loyalists included William Campbell (royal Governor of South Carolina) and Sir James Wright (royal Governor of Georgia). Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 89. Other considerations, such as the necessity to protect the Caribbean and oppose French operations, also played a role, but the idea of supporting southern Loyalists was a key factor in British strategic planning.

<sup>129</sup> James Simpson to Lord Germain, 28 August 1779. In "James Simpson's Reports on the Carolina Loyalists, 1779-1780," 516.



before the year 1780" and was "much persecuted for his Loyalty." He had also been forced to "lay in the Woods" for an entire winter. John Philips was jailed and threatened with hanging after refusing an oath to the rebel government and a lieutenant colonelcy in the Whig militia.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, such persecution forced much of the openly loyal population to flee the South Carolina frontier by 1780; many refugees had gone to Florida or other areas under British control. Those that remained, however, recalled their rough handling and wanted to repay it in kind. Much of the violence of the frontier war, as the Whig historian David Ramsay put it, stemmed from the fact that "Under the sanction of subduing rebellion, private revenge was justified."<sup>131</sup>

Of course, this desire for revenge necessarily followed a basic leaning towards the crown and against the rebellion in the first place. Some settlers, just as some rebels, simply believed in their cause, as shown by the widespread Whig-Tory tensions and fighting in 1775 and 1776. The specific motives for supporting the crown on the frontier numbered many, including general conservatism, distrust of the rebellious coastal planters, ethnic links with England, religious pacifism, the holding of Royal offices, and concern over land titles.<sup>132</sup> One very active Loyalist, Alexander Chesney, stated simply that when he was presented with resolutions by the rebels, "I opposed them."<sup>133</sup> In sum, there were a significant number of men who were loyal to Britain from the start of the war, and events in the years before 1780 gave them further reasons to oppose the rebels.

But four years under Whig control and suppression weakened the strength and will of the frontier Loyalists, in addition to reducing their numbers. By 1780, their ability to rise up against the rebels almost wholly depended upon the British Army. Even before the British invasion, the Loyalists who spoke with James Simpson acknowledged that they had neither arms nor ammunition, and needed the Royal government to provide them with the means to resist.<sup>134</sup> After the invasion, the presence of the King's troops across the state finally gave the local Tories an opportunity to openly profess and support their cause. As examples, Alexander Burnside "had no Opportunity of taking up Arms before the British came to Camden which he did immediately." James Miller "took

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<sup>130</sup> Hugh E. Egerton, editor, *The Royal Commission on the Losses and Services of American Loyalists, 1783 to 1785* (New York: Lenox Hill, 1915; reprinted 1971), 56 (Alexander Burnside), 51-52 (James Miller), and 48 (John Philips).

<sup>131</sup> David Ramsay, *The History of South-Carolina, From its First Settlement in 1670, to the Year 1808* (Charleston: David Longworth, 1809), 256.

<sup>132</sup> See Barnwell, "Loyalism in South Carolina," 135-142, and Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 24-29.

<sup>133</sup> Alexander Chesney, "The Journal of Alexander Chesney, a South Carolina Loyalist in the Revolution and After," ed. E. Alfred Jones, *The Ohio State University Bulletin*, Vol. XXVI, No. 4 (30 October 1921), 5.

<sup>134</sup> James Simpson to Lord Germain, 28 August 1779. In "James Simpson's Reports on the Carolina Loyalists, 1779-1780," 516-517.



the first Opportunity of joining the British . . . at Camden." Alexander Chesney waited until Charleston fell before embodying with several other Loyalists, and John Philips "staid tolerably quiet untill Charleston was taken," but subsequently joined the British at Camden and brought fifty loyalists with him.<sup>135</sup> The presence of British forces both enabled the loyal militia to form and motivated them to do so.

The British military successes, particularly Charleston's capture, also motivated the local Loyalists, as even halfhearted supporters sought to side with the winners and participate in the transition back to Royal control. Even Tarleton's 'massacre' of Buford at the Waxhaws, when viewed from the Tory perspective, could seem a major victory, driving the last enemy troops out of the state. The largely unopposed occupation of South Carolina through the end of May and June also encouraged Loyalist enlistments. Robert Gray, a backcountry Tory militia colonel, believed that the "loyal part of the inhabitants . . . readily took up arms to maintain the British government . . . partly to ingratiate themselves with the conquerors."<sup>136</sup>

This desire to be on the winning side was closely related to a general longing for peace and order throughout the backcountry. Colonel Gray claimed that Loyalists "believed the war to be at an end in the Southern provinces" and wanted to begin enjoying the "tranquillity" of peace under British control.<sup>137</sup> James Simpson wrote that many settlers expressed a desire for "Settlement and Peace," recalling the prosperity of "the old times" before the war.<sup>138</sup> Even the observations of some Whigs supported these ideas, as James Collins maintained that "Vast numbers flocked in and submitted" to the British after the fall of Charleston "through a hope that all things would settle down and war cease." Many residents merely wanted order and protection for their property, and the British seemed in a good position to provide them.

The desire for material gain also motivated Loyalists. Men could gain "Power & place" by serving in the Tory militia, and would be paid while serving.<sup>139</sup> General Clinton gave his Inspector of Militia, Patrick Ferguson, specific instruction about payment for the Loyalist militia. They were entitled to "Six pence Sterling per Day and Provisions during the Time of . . . actual Service," and

<sup>135</sup> Egerton, *Royal Commission*, 56 (Alexander Burnside), 51-52 (James Miller), 49 (Alexander Chesney), and 48 (John Philips).

<sup>136</sup> Robert Gray, "Colonel Robert Gray's Observations on the War in Carolina," *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (July, 1910), 140.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>138</sup> James Simpson to Lord Germain, 28 August 1779. In "James Simpson's Reports on the Carolina Loyalists, 1779-1780," 516.

<sup>139</sup> Gray, "Observations," 141.

also allowed to elect their own junior officers. They had to serve just six months of any year, only in South Carolina, and could not be put into the Provincial regulars or heavily disciplined. Only militiamen classed as 'offensive' had to actively campaign, with 'domestic' militia used solely for "the Maintenance of Peace and good Order throughout the Country." All things considered, these terms of service appeared fairly attractive, and the British widely publicized them.<sup>140</sup>

A final motive for the Tory militiamen was fear. In keeping with General Clinton's proclamation of 3 June, residents of South Carolina were forced to either serve in the Loyal militia or declare themselves rebels. This led many people who had no strong feelings about the rebellion into British service, particularly if they lived close to a British post and feared for their own safety or that of their families. Lord Rawdon, the British commander at Camden, was said to have jailed citizens of Camden who refused to serve in the loyal militia, and even put some in irons.<sup>141</sup> David Ramsay claimed that fear and interest, in general, caused backcountry residents to flock "to the British standard."<sup>142</sup> Certainly Christian Huck's speech to the York and Chester men bristled with threats of force to be used against those who did not enlist, and circumstances probably resulted in many unwilling recruits.

All of these motives – a desire for revenge, long-standing attachment to the royal cause, the presence and apparent victory of the British Army, material gain, and coercion – resulted in fairly successful mobilization of South Carolina Loyalists. By July 1780, the British had formed eighteen regiments of Loyalist militia, totaling over 2,500 men. In the region around York and Chester districts, there were two regiments based near Camden (under John Phillips and Henry Rugeley), and one based at Rocky Mount (under Mathew Floyd).<sup>143</sup> There is a strong possibility that many of the Tory militiamen with Huck at Williamson's Plantation were from the Camden regiments. The rebel sources named only two of them, Colonel Ferguson and Lieutenant John Adamson, indicating that the local rebel militiamen did not personally know the loyalists. This would make sense if the Loyalists were from Camden, some forty miles distant. Furthermore, John Adamson was in Henry

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<sup>140</sup> Henry Clinton, "Instructions to Major Ferguson, Inspector of Militia, 22 May 1780" in "An Officer Out of His Time: Major Patrick Ferguson, 1779-1780," *Sources of American Independence: Selected Manuscripts from the William L. Clements Library*, Vol. 2, ed. Howard Peckham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 358-360. The terms were publicized on a handbill dated 12 May 1780, the day of Charleston's surrender, and widely distributed around the state. Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 440-441.

<sup>141</sup> Robert Mills, *Statistics of South Carolina, Including a View of Its Natural, Civil, and Military History, General and Particular* (Charleston: Hurlbut and Lloyd, 1826), 254.

<sup>142</sup> Ramsay, *History of South-Carolina*, 253.

<sup>143</sup> See Barnwell, "Loyalism in South Carolina," 104-124 for a detailed discussion of the Loyalist militia organization. The regiments were generally small compared to regular regiments, a function of the limited number of loyalists available and willing to participate, their geographic base, and the Loyalists' desire for more officer positions.

Rugeley's regiment of Camden militia.<sup>144</sup> Since it was a fairly substantial town, a major British post, and a center of Loyalist activity, it is entirely possible that Camden militiamen accompanied Huck into the rebel-dominated York and Chester districts.

The initial recruiting success, however, did not last long. Despite good initial turnout for the Tory militia, their activity and participation faded quickly. After Huck's speech, his force numbered four or five hundred, and remained large through his attack on William Hill's ironworks. But the Loyalist militiamen drifted away over the following weeks, and by the morning of the battle, Huck's local auxiliaries had been greatly reduced in number. One reason for this might have been little apparent need for a strong and active militia in the eyes of the Loyalist population. The British and Provincial regulars had forced most of the rebels into submission or driven them away, and remained in the area to deal with any problems. Colonel Turnbull noted that the Tories around his post, uneasy at any prospect of Whig activity, quickly called on him for assistance.<sup>145</sup>

A second possibility for the ebb in Tory support was that the Loyalists were still recovering from four years of oppression and control by the rebels, and many of their best leaders and fighters had long since been driven out of the South Carolina backcountry. It would take time and experience for a new cadre of leadership to develop, and for the population to get used to British control. Without active leadership and inspiration, the Loyalists would have wanted to return to their farms and tend their crops. David Ramsay believed that the British were on the right track with the Loyal militia, but pushed the process too quickly in their desire to continue the offensive into North Carolina, asking too much of the Loyalists too soon.<sup>146</sup>

Finally, it must also have challenged British and Provincial regulars and the Tory militia to operate effectively together. Tensions were often high between regular and militia soldiers, and in the backcountry, cultural and ethnic differences between the northerners and the militiamen probably exacerbated the problem. Missions and objectives also caused friction. Huck's Loyalist lieutenant, John Adamson, clearly disagreed with Huck's treatment of Martha Bratton, and the Provincials' indiscriminate plundering also alienated some of the Loyalists. At other times, Loyalist demands for personal revenge against rebels who had accepted parole and protection irritated the regulars. The

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<sup>144</sup> Adamson is listed in Rugeley's regiment in pay abstracts in Murtie June Clark, *Loyalists in the Southern Campaign of the Revolutionary War*, Vol. 1 (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1981), 147. Also see Thomas Kirkland and Robert Kennedy, *Historic Camden* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1905), 281-290 for a discussion of Adamson's actions during and after the war. He was treated well for a Tory, due to his protection of Mrs. Bratton, was eventually accepted by the Camden patriot community, who petitioned the state to end his postwar banishment, and became a successful merchant.

<sup>145</sup> Colonel Turnbull to Lord Rawdon, 12 July 1780. In Jarrell, "Huck's Defeat," 2.

<sup>146</sup> Ramsay, *The History of South-Carolina*, 254.

fact that some of the Tories had to be forced into service would not have endeared them to the Provincials, and the feeling was probably mutual. For any hybrid force of Provincial regulars and local militiamen, such as Huck's detachment, cohesion was a significant problem.

Thus while the loyal militia remained strong in several parts of South Carolina up until the end of the war, they were not in York and Chester districts in July of 1780. Many local men did have some solid reasons to serve in the Loyalist militia at first, as the events of May and June showed. But most of the region's Tories lacked firm sustaining motives, and the number of active militiamen dropped considerably by the morning of 12 July. As the events of that day would show, the Loyalist militia's lack of motivation reduced the size of Huck's force at a critical time. Huck had too few men around Williamson's Plantation to overcome surprise and a poor position.

### **"In full possession of the field": The Fight and its Aftermath**

When the light grew enough to see, the rebels around Huck's camp "raised the war whoop, as they had agreed upon, and rushed to the attack."<sup>147</sup> They came from several directions, attacking Indian-style and hitting the few sentries first. The Whigs then moved between Huck's surprised troops and their horses, taking positions behind the rail fences and in a peach orchard. The Provincials and Tories fought as men "surprised, alarmed and surrounded," not putting up much initial resistance.<sup>148</sup> The battle was short; Richard Winn stated that "We was in full possession of the field in five minuites," though some sources maintained that it lasted longer.<sup>149</sup> The patriots certainly had much better tactical position, and an effective combination of muskets, rifles, and shotguns for the close-range firefight.

Huck's men showed some mettle in overcoming their initial surprise, attempting to rally, and even managing to make three abortive bayonet charges, but the rebels behind the fences held.<sup>150</sup>

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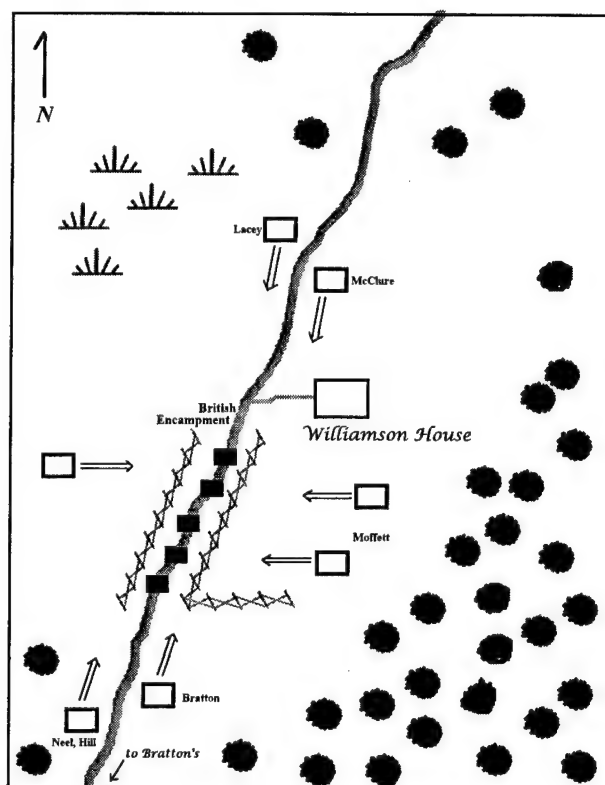
<sup>147</sup> Logan, *History of the Upper Country of South Carolina*, 61.

<sup>148</sup> Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 337-338. Much of this version is based on the personal recollections of Dr. John S. Bratton, Colonel Bratton's son, who was five on the day of the battle. Though Colonel Bratton left no written record, the battle was likely an important part of Bratton family history.

<sup>149</sup> Winn, "Notes," 206. The longer estimate, of about an hour, was mainly in secondary sources and probably included the pursuit of the fugitives; even with the slower pace of 18<sup>th</sup>-century warfare, an hour seems far too long for a surprise attack with forces of this size. James Collins recalled that he fired his musket only twice. Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 27.

<sup>150</sup> This effective assortment of militia weapons unintentionally duplicated Daniel Morgan's combination of rifleman and infantrymen at Saratoga. Also see Weller, "Irregular but Effective," 121-123, for the rebel tendency to use several projectiles (the 'buck and ball' load) in their weapons; Huck was said to have been killed by a musket loaded with two bullets. Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 27, and Moore, *Life of General Edward Lacey*, 8. The

Huck himself managed to mount his horse, shouting encouragement to his men and calling on the "Damned Rebels" to disperse, before being hit and killed. The Loyalists, particularly the Provincials, did illustrate cohesion, discipline, and combat motivation in the fight, but these could not overcome the rebel position, numbers, and other advantages. Local tradition held that at the height of the brief battle, the word "Boys, take the fence and every man his own commander!" passed among the rebel ranks.<sup>151</sup> At this point, the rebels closed in and the remaining Loyalists, Provincial and militia alike, surrendered. The rebels killed, wounded, or captured virtually all of Huck's force, with only about twenty-five escaping, and also quickly discovered and freed the prisoners from a nearby corncrib.<sup>152</sup>



Map 3 - The Battle of Williamson's Plantation, 12 July 1780<sup>153</sup>

New York Volunteers probably made the bayonet charges, as the Tory militiamen would be trained or disciplined for such an attack, and the Legion dragoons would not be equipped for it.

<sup>151</sup> Moore, *Life of General Edward Lacey*, 7.

<sup>152</sup> Letter from Colonel Turnbull to Lord Rawdon, 12 July 1780. In Jarrell, "Huck's Defeat," 3. Also see Allaire, "Diary," 500. Allaire mentions only two escapees, but was considering only the Provincial soldiers, and his source (Lieutenant Hunt, of the British Legion) "could give no account of" the Loyal militia. In his report to Clinton, Cornwallis stated that only a dozen members of the Legion and an equal number of Loyal militia escaped. Tarleton, *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781*, 121.

The record of events immediately after the battle lacked clarity. Some accounts told of the rebels killing prisoners in retribution for Buford's Massacre and the murder of William Strong. One version claimed that the patriots killed Colonel Ferguson, the Tory militia leader, immediately after the fighting stopped, and by all accounts the patriots hotly pursued the fugitives.<sup>154</sup> The heavily one-sided casualty figures – the rebels had only one or two wounded, compared to the Loyalists' thirty dead and fifty wounded – indicated the possibility of such atrocities. Since revenge was such a significant motive for the patriots, the possibility of violent retribution certainly existed. None of the eyewitness accounts, however, mentioned any widespread cruelty. Richard Winn spoke of caring for the enemy wounded and giving parole to Lieutenant Hunt of the British Legion, while William Hill and James Collins made no mention of any atrocities.<sup>155</sup> Local tradition held that Martha Bratton tended many of the wounded and indeed saved John Adamson's life for restraining Huck the day before.<sup>156</sup> The high casualties could also have resulted from a surprise attack on a sleeping force that was disciplined enough to attempt to form and fight, or from the assortment of rebel weapons firing at short ranges. The large number of prisoners also indicated a lack of vengeance killings, even with revenge as a main motive for the rebels.

These prisoners, in fact, presented a problem for the militiamen, as they had no way to deal with the captives. According to William Hill, the wounded prisoners were put into the care of local Tory families, and probably paroled. The unwounded prisoners most likely also received paroles, though some may have been sent north to the rebel military stronghold at Hillsborough, North Carolina.<sup>157</sup> The rebels often treated halfhearted or rank-and-file Loyalists leniently, which sometimes resulted in their no longer supporting the British or joining the rebels. The Whigs treated hard-core or 'violent' Tories less kindly.

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<sup>153</sup> Adapted from an unpublished sketch map developed by Sam Thomas and Wade Fairey, of Historic Brattonsville, the historical agency that owns and administers the site of the battle. There is debate over where the battle actually occurred. One version, supported by a diagram in the Draper Manuscripts, claims the Williamson plantation was to the east of Bratton's plantation. See Joseph Wilkins, Howell Hunter, and Richard Carillo, *Historical, Architectural, and Archeological Research at Brattonsville, York County, South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1975), 14. The other version, that Williamson's was north of Bratton's, is based on deeds and land records and is far more persuasive; see Fairey, *Historic Brattonsville*, 56-59.

<sup>154</sup> Moore, *Life of General Edward Lacey*, 7.

<sup>155</sup> Winn, "Notes," 206-207. This same Lieutenant Hunt was the man who brought the first tidings of the loss to Anthony Allaire and the rest of the British posts; Allaire, "Diary," 500. It should be noted that Hunt told Allaire he escaped while Winn claims that he was paroled; as Winn knew Hunt's name, his story is most likely correct. The Loyalist casualty figures are approximate; see Boatner, *Encyclopedia*, 1211.

<sup>156</sup> Ellet, *Women of the Revolution*, Vol. 1, 244-245.

<sup>157</sup> Hill, *Memoirs of the Revolution*, 10, and Allaire, "Diary," 512. Allaire himself was captured at King's Mountain in October of 1780 and escorted to North Carolina by rebel militiamen.

Whatever happened to the captured and the wounded, all sources agreed on the plundering after the battle and its importance. Richard Winn recalled that “one hundred horses, saddles, bridles, pistols, swords, and many other things” were “got together and divided among the officers and men, much to their satisfaction,” though he did not take “a copper’s worth” himself.<sup>158</sup> Edward Doyle stated that “in this engagement at Bratton’s we took several horses, guns, swords, and pistols” along with the prisoners.<sup>159</sup> One rebel called the horses captured a “valuable acquisition,” just behind the release of the prisoners and the “preservation of the Whigs, with their property” in significance.<sup>160</sup> James Collins remembered an argument over Huck’s sword between two men who claimed to have shot him, and other accounts mentioned that Huck’s razor was taken as a trophy. The rebels also captured several slaves.<sup>161</sup> The prominent mention of the loot taken after the fight strongly supports the idea that plunder was a powerful rebel motive.

After dividing the spoils of victory, the Whigs returned to their camps or dispersed to their homes. Their immediate combat motives of survival, opportunity, and necessity no longer applied, and the desire of many of the rebels for revenge had been met in the dramatic victory over Huck and his men. The rebels who went home illustrated one of the weaknesses of the Revolutionary militia – when they felt that it was time to go, whatever the reason, they generally left. The vast majority of the rebels from Williamson’s Plantation would fight again, but the victory satisfied their thirst for fighting for a time.<sup>162</sup>

Despite this short-term dispersal, the victory at Williamson’s Plantation had extremely positive results for the larger patriot cause. Huck’s force was destroyed, eliminating a local threat and providing the first defeat to regular enemy forces in South Carolina. The British and Provincial regulars thus lost their air of invincibility, and demonstrated that they were neither strong nor numerous enough to completely control the countryside and ensure the safety of the Loyal

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<sup>158</sup> Winn, “Notes,” 206. Winn’s phrasing implies that the officers may have looked down on plundering, but they obviously did nothing to stop it, even if they did not themselves participate.

<sup>159</sup> Edward Doyle, Federal Pension Account S32216, National Archives Microfilm M804, Roll 848, Frame 0350.

<sup>160</sup> Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 343.

<sup>161</sup> Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 26-27; Ellet, *Women of the American Revolution*, Vol. 3, 185; and letters from James Hemphill to Lyman Draper in Volume 4 of the Draper Manuscripts, Series UU (Thomas Sumter Papers), Wisconsin Historical Society, especially frames 76, 78, and 84. John Nixon captured a slave named Sam, and the Nixons kept Sam and his descendants until their emancipation in 1865.

<sup>162</sup> Of the men who fought at Williamson’s, nearly all fought in the local battles of Hanging Rock and Rocky Mount, and almost a third went on to more extensive service; see the roster of the 72 patriots at Appendix 2. The longest-serving patriot was John Adair, who served throughout the Revolutionary War, later became the governor of Kentucky, and served under Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812.



population.<sup>163</sup> As a result of conditions similar to those in York and Chester districts, as well as news of Huck's defeat, rebel resistance quickly reappeared all over the backcountry. There were attacks on British and Loyalist forces later on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July and also on the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup>. Though these attacks were small, spontaneous, and uncoordinated, they began a trend. Hardly a fortnight would pass from July 1780 until the British were confined to Charleston in 1782 without some kind of active fighting in South Carolina.<sup>164</sup>

Whig recruiting shot up dramatically, with the flush of victory a new motive for the rebels, while Loyalist recruiting lagged. Thomas Sumter's force increased to about five hundred men, including many veterans of Williamson's Plantation, and he soon felt able to attack the British at Rocky Mount on 30 July and at Hanging Rock on 6 August.<sup>165</sup> During this period, a large portion of Mathew Floyd's regiment of Loyalist militia, under the leadership of an officer named John Lisle, also defected to the rebels, with all of their equipment – a coup for both recruiting and supplying the patriots. Most importantly, the rebel cause would never again sink to the low point of May and June. Even the disastrous rebel losses at Camden on 16 August and at Fishing Creek two days later made little difference to the widespread operations of the South Carolina militia.<sup>166</sup>

Two weeks after reporting to General Clinton that his forces had put an end to all resistance in South Carolina, Lord Cornwallis was forced to change his opinion. On July 14<sup>th</sup>, Cornwallis wrote that on the frontier and in central North Carolina "the aspect of affairs is not so peaceable as when I wrote last." A day later, he related the news of Huck's defeat, and dispatches from the South were never again quite so optimistic as they were in the early summer of 1780.<sup>167</sup> The rebel victory

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<sup>163</sup> Morrill, *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution*, 174.

<sup>164</sup> See Terry Lipscomb, *Battles, Skirmishes, and Actions of the American Revolution in South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1991), 7-24, and Howard Peckham, *The Toll of Independence: Engagements and Battle Casualties of the American Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), *passim*. The other battles were Cedar Springs (12<sup>th</sup>), Gowen's Old Fort (13<sup>th</sup>), Earle's Ford (14<sup>th</sup>) and Fort Prince (15<sup>th</sup>). Though these early skirmishes did not represent a coordinated offensive, by late 1780 and 1781, as Continental forces returned to the South and leaders such as Thomas Sumter, Francis Marion, and Andrew Pickens took greater charge of the militia and irregulars, the minor battles did begin to contribute to a larger design.

<sup>165</sup> According to Bobby Moss' *Roster of South Carolina Patriots in the American Revolution*, *passim*, over one hundred local South Carolinians began their service with the battles of Rocky Mount and Hanging Rock, the first battles after Williamson's Plantation.

<sup>166</sup> Franklin and Mary Wickwire, *Cornwallis: The American Adventure* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 192. The Wickwires present a good analysis of the overall shortcomings of the Loyalist militia and Cornwallis' problems with pacification on 169-193.

<sup>167</sup> Cornwallis to Clinton, 14 July 1780. In *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, Vol. 1, edited by Charles Ross (London: John Murray, 1859), 51. Cornwallis may have been speaking specifically about the Loyalist defeat at Ramsour's Mill, North Carolina in this letter, as he probably had not yet heard the news about the loss at Williamson's Plantation. His first letter mentioning Huck's defeat was that of the 15<sup>th</sup>. Cornwallis to Clinton, 15 July 1780. In Tarleton, *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781*, 121.

at Williamson's Plantation was a small but significant milepost on the way to future patriot victories at King's Mountain, Cowpens, and Yorktown.<sup>168</sup>

### Conclusion

The motives of the South Carolina rebels turned submission into resistance and that resistance into a small victory. That victory, in turn, provided new motives and contributed to the success of the larger struggle. The patriots' combination of initial motives – belief in the rebellion, a tradition of violence, religion and ethnicity, and desire for revenge and plunder – enabled them to recruit and field a viable military force. This force was sustained in the field largely by those same motives combined with growing cohesion and effective leadership. With the addition of the combat motives of immediate necessity and a good opportunity, the Whig militia sought battle and fought effectively on the morning of 12 July.

The motivations of the Loyalists, both Provincial and militia, were also important. Factors such as support for the crown, revenge, desires for material gain and prestige, and hopes for peace and order after a British victory led a respectable number of Provincials to serve. Similar motives, as well as events in the backcountry also brought forth many South Carolina Loyalists immediately after the British invasion. But the challenges to cohesion between Provincials and militiamen, added to the coerced service, lack of will and leadership, and perceived lack of necessity hampered the Loyalists' efforts to sustain their forces. Though some of Huck's men fought well, he did not have enough of them to withstand the rebel attack.

While this analysis of military motivation at the Battle of Williamson's Plantation cannot reasonably be extended much past the men in York and Chester districts in July 1780, it illustrates many points applicable to the backcountry war all across the South. More importantly, it illustrates the complex nature of military motivation in the War for Independence. Better understanding the factors that motivated soldiers to enlist, remain in the armies, and fight can truly contribute to a larger understanding of the war and its outcome.

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<sup>168</sup> See Higginbotham, "The American Militia," and Robert Pugh, "The Revolutionary Militia in the Southern Campaign, 1780-1781," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April 1957), 154-175 for a basic evaluation of the importance of the militia in general and in the southern theater.

**Appendix 1**  
**Timeline – Summer 1780**

<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Rebel/Patriot Action</u></b>	<b><u>British/Loyalist Action</u></b>
12 May		fall of Charleston
13-28 May		occupation of South Carolina, establishment of posts
29 May		Buford's Massacre at Waxhaws
c. 3 June	Mobley's Meeting House	
6 June	Alexander's Old Fields	
c. 9 June	Stalling's	
11 June		Huck sent out; church burned, William Strong killed
c. 12 June	Bullock's Creek meeting	
c. 15 June c. 16 June	Hill's Ironworks meeting Patriots establish camp in North Carolina	Huck's speech
18 June 19 June		Huck destroys Hill's Ironworks Huck moves to White's Mills
20 June 20-30 June	Battle at Ramsour's Mill, NC	Huck continues local activities
1-10 July		Huck continues local activities
11 July 12 July	<b>Battle of Williamson's Plantation</b>	Huck camps at Williamson's
13-29 July	Patriot recruiting increases; other small backcountry actions	
30 July	Sumter attacks Rocky Mount	

## Appendix 2

### Roster of Patriot Militiamen at Williamson's Plantation

	Name	Rank	Age	Residence	Church	Military Service		Federal Pension
						Prior	Subsequent	
1.	Adair, John	private	23	Chester		yes	yes	W2895
2.	Adair, Joseph	private						
3.	Adair, William	private					yes	W9691
4.	Anderson, William	private		Chester	Catholic		yes	
5.	Armstrong, William	private	15	Fairfield		no	yes	S6354
6.	Bishop, Henry	private		Chester	Fshng Crk	no	yes	
7.	Bishop, John	private		Chester	Fshng Crk	no	yes	S9279
8.	Bratton, William	colonel	38	York	Bethesda	yes	yes	
9.	Brown, Archibald	private		York		yes	yes	S39249
10.	Campbell, John	private			Bethel			
11.	Campbell, Thomas	private			Bethel			
12.	Carroll, Joseph	private	24	York		yes	yes	W9778
13.	Carroll, John	private				yes	yes	R1733
14.	Carroll, Thomas	private				yes	yes	
15.	Carson, Walter	captain	22	Camden		yes	yes	S32165
16.	Carson, William	private	31	York		yes	yes	S9305
17.	Chambers, John	private	38	York		yes		
18.	Clinton, James	private	19	York		yes	yes	S2437
19.	Collins, James	private	16	York	Beersheba	yes	yes	R2173
20.	Craig, John	private	19	York	Bethel	yes	yes	W22864
21.	Cunningham, George	private	27	York		yes	yes	W2071
22.	Doyle, Edward	private	22	Ninety-Six		yes	yes	S32216
23.	Evans, Owen	private				yes	yes	W10965
24.	Forbes, John			York				R3645
25.	Gaston, Hugh	private	29	Chester	Fshng Crk	yes	yes	S10729
26.	Gaston, William	private		Chester	Fshng Crk	yes	yes	S32265
27.	Gill, James	private		Chester	Fshng Crk		yes	R4023
28.	Hill, William	colonel	40	York	Bethel	yes	yes	
29.	Hillhouse, William	private	20	York		yes	yes	S7008
30.	Houston, Samuel	private	19	Chester		yes	yes	W7810
31.	Jameson, James	captain	25	York	Catholic	yes	yes	S21839
32.	Jenkins, William	sergeant	18	York		no	yes	S31774
33.	Johnson, James	private	25	Chester			yes	W9088
34.	Jones, Jonathan	private		Chester	Fshng Crk		yes	
35.	Knox, William	private	28	Chester	Catholic	yes	yes	S38900
36.	Lacey, Edward	captain	38	Chester	Bllocks Crk	yes	yes	
37.	Lofton, Andrew	private		York		yes	yes	
38.	Lofton, Thomas	private	19	York		yes	yes	S17114
39.	Love, Andrew	captain			Bethel			
40.	Martin, James	captain	25	York		yes	yes	S9391
41.	McCaw, James	private	18	Chester		yes	yes	S18117
42.	McClure, Hugh	private		York	Fshng Crk	yes	yes	W21789
43.	McClure, John	captain		York	Fshng Crk	yes	yes	
44.	Mills, John	captain		Chester	Fshng Crk	yes	yes	W9194
45.	Mitchell, James							
46.	Moffett, John	captain	38	Chester	Beersheba	yes	yes	

Name	Rank	Age	Residence	Church	Military Service		Federal Pension
					Prior	Subsequent	
47. Moore, James	major		York		yes	yes	
48. Moore, Alexander	private	24				yes	
49. Morrow, David	private	18	Chester	Bethesda	yes	yes	S7253
50. Morrow, Joseph	private	20	Chester		yes	yes	S21892
51. Neel, Andrew	colonel		York	Bethel		yes	
52. Neel, Thomas, Jr.	captain		York	Bethel		yes	
53. Neely, George	private		Camden	Fshng Crk	no	yes	S4613
54. Nixon, John	captain	25	York	Catholic	yes	yes	
55. Patterson, Robert	private	23	York		yes	yes	
56. Patton, John	private	25	York		yes	yes	W162
57. Rea, Henry	private	22	Cheraw		yes	yes	W9246
58. Read, unknown	captain						
59. Robinson, Joseph	private		Chester		yes	yes	W10246
60. Robinson, William	private	20	York		yes	yes	S21452
61. Ross, George	private	20	York		yes	yes	S1717
62. Ross, James	private						
63. Sadler, David	private	18	York		yes	yes	S9471
64. Steel, John	private		Chester	Catholic	yes	yes	
65. Wallace, James	private	30	York		yes	yes	S19145
66. Wallace, John	private		York		yes	yes	W955
67. Wallace, Samuel	private	20	York		no	yes	W6408
68. Watson, Samuel	lieutenant	26	York	Fshng Crk	yes	yes	S17187
69. Williamson, Samuel	private						W6408
70. Winn, Richard	major	30	York		yes	yes	
71. Woods, Thomas, Sr.	private	22	York		yes	yes	S32614
72. Wylie, Francis	private	30	Chester		yes	yes	21592

**Notes:**

-All of these 'definite' entries are found listed in at least one primary source. Most are also mentioned in one or more secondary sources, or mentioned or cross-referenced in the Federal Pension Applications.

-Not included in this list are twenty-four 'possible' entries, with unclear or doubtful indicators of participation in the battle. Of these, nineteen share a surname with and were presumably related to a 'definite' participant.

-Also not included are seventeen entries found only in McCrady's *History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780*. All of these entries have no other documentation, but all do share a surname with a 'definite' participant.

- Labeling rank, congregation, and even residence is risky, as many of these changed over time.

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